MAR.
15¢

TEXAS RANGERS

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

THE GHOST IN GOLDEN ARMOR

A Jim Hatfield Novel

By JACKSON COLE

To the Person who is DEAF and is Tired of Straining to HEAR

● Do you miss music, the voices of loved ones, all the sounds that make up life?

Sounds long lost—even low-voiced conversation, church sermons and business conferences with many voices taking part, are all brought back with Beltone, the new amazing One-Unit Hearing Aid.

This tiny device, which weighs only a few ounces, is all you wear. No more heavy, clumsy separate battery packs or dangling battery wires. The Beltone reproduces faithfully the sounds you want to hear without discomfort or inconvenience. No button need show in the ear.

FREE!

Learn how much better and more clearly Beltone uncovers precious sounds you, perhaps, thought lost forever. Just mail coupon for valuable free book. No cost or obligation.

REPLACEMENT OR REFUND OF MONEY
Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping
IF NOT AS ADVERTISED THEREIN

FREE BOOKLET - MAIL COUPON

BELTONE HEARING AID CO., Dept. TFG-3
1450 W. 19th Street, Chicago 8, Illinois

Please send me, without cost or obligation, the new FREE booklet of interesting facts about DEAFNESS and HOW TO OVERCOME IT.

Name.....

Address.....

Town.....State.....

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $3,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then more difficult ones. If you could do this—and could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex — soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. We'll also include "Ten Years' Promotion in One"—a book which has helped many men. Send us the coupon *now*.

Over 2800 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni

LASALLE EXTENSION
CHICAGO 5, ILL.

Other LaSalle Opportunities

- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ C.P.A. Coaching
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Law: LL.B. Degree
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Industr'l Management
- ☐ Stenotypy (Machine Shorthand)

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

417 S. Dearborn St. Dept. 3329-HR Chicago 5, Ill.

I want to be an accountant. Send me without obligation, "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays" training program—also "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

Name.....*Age*.....

Address.....

City, Zone & State.....

TEXAS RANGERS

VOLUME 34, NUMBER 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION MARCH, 1949

COMPLETE NOVEL

The Ghost in Golden Armor

By Jackson Cole

"No Rangers wanted south of the Nueces," warned the killer—and that's just why Jim Hatfield, Lone Wolf Ranger, headed that way to challenge a grim, mysterious spectre haunting the range! **13**

SHORT STORIES

A RANGER BREAKS IN ..... ***by Hiram Vermont*** **72**
Fiddle-playin' Prim Holston charms wolves and desperadoes into six-gun range

LAWMAN NEEDED ..... ***by Tex Mumford*** **78**
Young Brad Martin rides clear into the storm center of danger-packed trouble

FEATURES

THE FRONTIER POST ..... ***by Captain Starr*** **6**
A friendly get-together confab for readers, plus announcements and letters

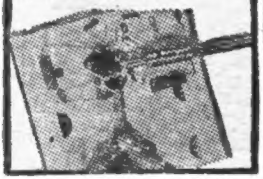
ROUNDUP OF WESTERN FACTS ..... ***by Rex Sherrick*** **77**
A selection of interesting oddities from the annals of the Western Frontier

SENOR EL COLT ..... ***by Harold Preece*** **82**
The exciting true saga of Sam Walker, the Ranger who gave his name to a gun

TEXAS RANGERS. Published monthly by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription yearly $1.80; Single copies $.15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Re-entered as second-class matter April 9, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1949, by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any real person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any.

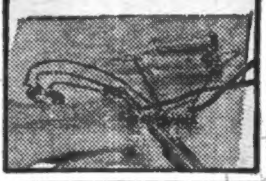
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

YOU PRACTICE Radio Soldering with Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts I send you. Get practical experience mounting and connecting parts.

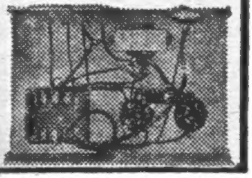


YOU BUILD this Tester with parts N. R. I. sends early in the course. Soon helps you fix neighbors' Radios and EARN EXTRA MONEY in spare time.

YOU TEST Radio circuits like this built with parts I send. Build special circuits; learn how to locate and repair circuit defects.



YOU BUILD Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds. Learn how to correct Power Pack troubles.



YOU BUILD this A. M. Signal Generator for more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.

YOU PRACTICE FM (Frequency Modulation) experiments, get more experience with this Superheterodyne Receiver Circuit you build with parts I send.

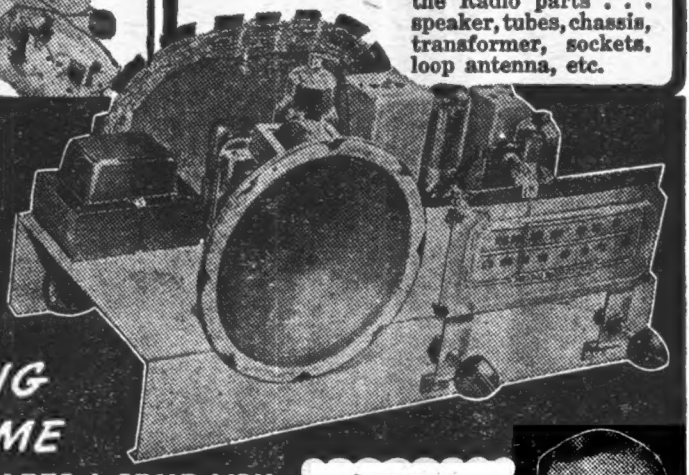
You Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE With This Superheterodyne Receiver

YOU BUILD THIS complete, powerful Radio Receiver that brings in local and distant stations. N. R. I. gives you ALL the Radio parts . . . speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, sockets, loop antenna, etc.

LEARN RADIO

BY PRACTICING IN SPARE TIME

WITH BIG KITS OF PARTS I SEND YOU



Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in RADIO—Television, Electronics," both FREE. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience building, testing Radio circuits with BIG KITS OF PARTS I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY manuals that show how to make EXTRA money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! Now's the time to get into Radio Repair. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even GREATER opportunities as demand for Television, FM and Electronic devices grows.

Find Out What NRI Can Do For You

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my FREE 64-page book. Read the details about the Course, letters from men I trained; see how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! MAIL COUPON NOW. J. E. SMITH, President Dept. 9C09, National Radio Institute, *Pioneer Home Study Radio School*, Washington 9, D. C.

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME

MY COURSE INCLUDES **TELEVISION** *ELECTRONICS*

I TRAINED THESE MEN

Has Own Radio Service

"I have my own Radio and Television sales and servicing business. I get enough repair jobs to keep me going right along."—ALEXANDER KISH, 34 Pershing Avenue, Carteret, N. J.

Good Spare Time Business

"I have been getting receivers to repair right along, and with NRI methods I don't have to spend much time on them."—S. N. STRICKLAND, 191 Dale Homes, Portsmouth, Va.

VETERANS

You get this training in your own home under G. I. Bill. Mail Coupon.

GET BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9C09
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page book about how to win success in Radio and Television—Electronics. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

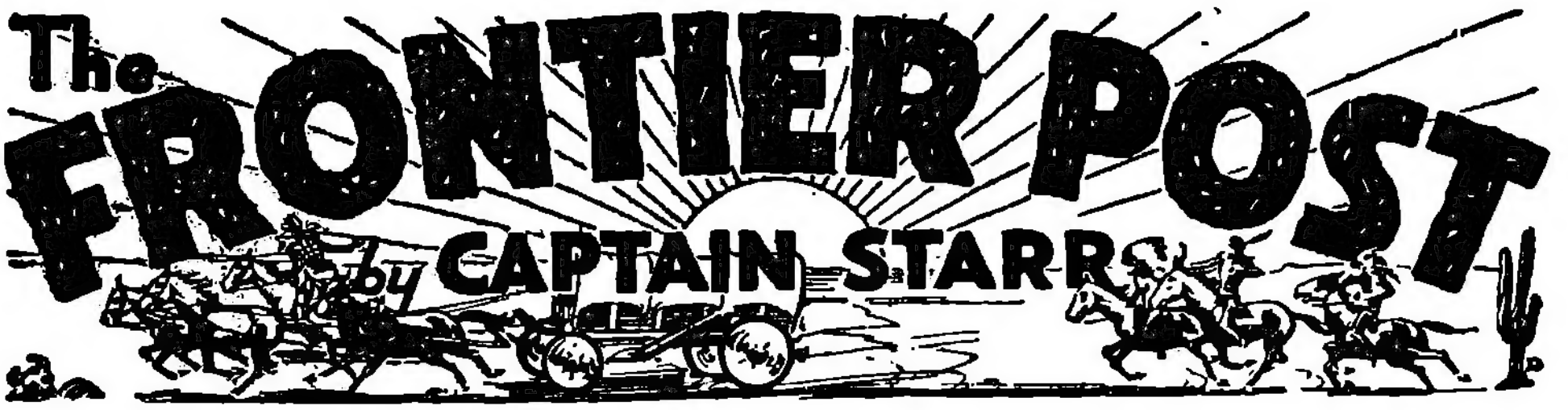
Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

☐ Check if Veteran

APPROVED FOR TRAINING UNDER GI BILL



HIYA, gals and galluses! How many of you ever saw a County Fair? I'm just an old simple Simon, uncultured as a jackrabbit, and that's why I'd rather go to a County Fair, anywhere from Texas west, than to the most talked-of stage play that ever hit Broadway.

Here's how I feel about it. A show, no matter how entertaining, is as shallow and artificial as any theater prop. Every character and episode is overdrawn. They have to be, to meet dramatic requirements.

The Heart of America

There's no make-believe about a County Fair. It is life itself, with its sleeves rolled up. At the Fair you see and feel the warm, true heartbeat of the real creators and producers of America. You rub elbows with 'em, these sons and daughters of the land, and you come away humbly thankful, to them. It's the farmers and stockmen and other growers that feed and clothe us all, and supply the grist for the wheels of commerce and industry.

The County Fair really is a thanksgiving, because Fair Week comes around in the fall, at harvest time.

Through the growing months, the County Fair grounds are silent and deserted. But when Fair Week arrives, the place blossoms out in bunting and throbs with music and the commotion of crowds.

The core of interest in the exhibit buildings. Here are displayed the finest samples of the season's yield. The displays are shown in sections, one for every farm grange in the county. Sometimes the name of the grange is spelled out in flowers, or in seeds, or some other natural, artistic pattern. You see sheaves of grain, as tall as a man, and cornstalks that reach almost to the ceiling. There are squashes and pumpkins that need only the touch of a fairy's wand to become Cinderella coaches. Heaps of fruits and vegetabes make a riot of color and there are showings of specialty crops for which certain communities are famous.

Art and Handicrafts

But that isn't all. The handicraft of country wives and daughters is shown at the County Fair—crazy quilts, masterpieces of embroidery and other "fancy work," and all the creations of needle and loom that tell of many a busy evening.

The country schools exhibit at the Fair, too. You see the useful articles of wood and metal little Johnny built with his own hands in manual training class, and on a platform, under a spotlight, a bashful little country gal demonstrates in a glittering, modern farm kitchen, the skill she learned in cooking school.

There's a fine arts section, too. In this you see the creations of mind and imagination. Like most youthful art, it only reflects more mature achievements. But now and then a painting, design or sculpture is boldly original, and you know that some gifted boy or girl has set foot on the long, hard ladder of fame.

Yonder in back of the exhibit buildings are the stables, the cattle and hog and sheep pens, and the poultry showings. These live exhibits are fed and slicked up to perfection, and a good many are entered by the farm boy members of the Four H Club. The prize-winning critters are often sold at auction, and bring handsome money.

A Colorful Pageant

To city and townspeople, the County Fair is a colorful pageant. But it is an exciting competition among the countryfolks. Prizes are awarded by a board of judges for every class of exhbit. A blue ribbon winner can be mighty proud, whether the honor came

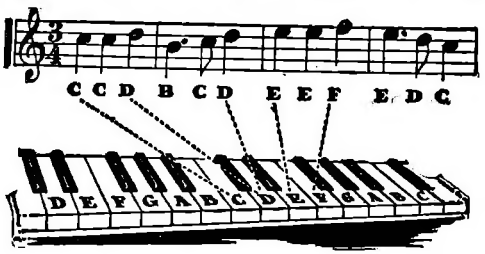
(Continued on page 8)

Over 850,000 people

have studied music this easy way

SEE HOW SIMPLE IT IS!

"My country 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty"



The first note on the music above is "c." Follow the dotted line to the keyboard and locate "c" on the piano. Find the other notes the same way. As you strike them you'll be playing the melody of "America." Easy, isn't it? And it's easy to play other tunes, too. For a remarkable invention, the "Note-Finder," tells you just where each note is located on the piano keyboard.

You, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument, quickly, easily, right in your own home!

YES, OVER 850,000 delighted people have studied music this quick, easy, inexpensive way. Some are now on the stage, others on the radio, and thousands more are enjoying the new pleasure and popularity of being able to play. Isn't this convincing proof of the success of the new U. S. School of Music method? Many students didn't know one note from another. Yet in a short time they learned to play their favorite instrument. And they found learning this modern way amazingly easy and loads of fun. What countless others have done, YOU, too, can do!

Right from the start you learn real tunes by note. First you are told how to do a thing. Then a picture shows you how to do it. Finally you do it yourself and hear how it goes. Almost before you realize it, you are playing your favorite pieces. No private teacher could make it clearer.

LAWRENCE WELK

famous band leader

Lawrence Welk's achievements should be an inspiration to all students of music. His rise to fame was rapid. He has played for leading theatres, hotels, and radio networks. And he did it all without a professional music teacher. Here's what he says: "I studied the accordion with the U. S. School and was surprised at how simple their method made learning music. I can highly recommend this school to anyone interested in learning music quickly without a private teacher, at such a low cost."

WIN FRIENDS—ENJOY NEW POPULARITY

Best of all it costs only a few cents a day. That includes everything . . . no extras of any kind. Don't miss any more fun. Learn to play your favorite instrument and surprise your friends. Music, you know, makes most any party a success. Those who can play are invited everywhere. So get started on the way to musical good times NOW!

If you want to be a "hit" at every party . . . if you really do want to play your favorite instrument . . . fill out and mail the coupon below, asking for our Free Illustrated Booklet and Print and Picture Sample. These show you how quickly and easily you can learn music in your own home at little cost. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.)

51st Anniversary

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
2943 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. 10, N. Y.

FREE PRINT AND PICTURE SAMPLE

U. S. School of Music, 2943 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. 10, N. Y.
Please send me Free Booklet and Print and Picture Sample. I would like to play instrument checked below.

(Do you have instrument _____)

Piano	Accordion	Trumpet	Ukulele
Violin	Mandolin	Trombone	Clarinet
Guitar	Saxaphone	Tenor Banjo	Other Instrument

Mr. / Mrs. / Miss _____ (PLEASE PRINT)

Street _____

City _____ State _____

Note! If you are under 16 yrs. of age parents must sign coupon

Save 2c—Stick Coupon on penny postcard.

$100.00 A WEEK!

Big money? It certainly is, but that's what electricians are pulling down these days! In fact, many of them are making considerably more than that.
Now you too can learn how to plan, install, repair and maintain any house wiring system — and do the work in accordance with the highest standards.

PRACTICAL RESIDENTIAL WIRING

By John F. Nowak

Here at last is a complete practical book on house wiring, which you can use to do complete electrical jobs—from the smallest repairs to the wiring of an entire home. It begins by showing you how to draw electrical diagrams, and proceeds, step by step, through every type of present-day installation. Then the author shows you exactly how to do the actual work, and furnishes hundreds of hands-at-work photographs. The National Electrical Code is clearly applied at each crucial point, insuring that everything you do fulfills Code requirements. Throughout this great handbook every step is explained in plain English which requires no previous knowledge of electricity or experience in electrical work. See for yourself how completely this book covers every detail of planning, installation, repair, and maintenance. Mail the coupon now for a FREE 10-day examination of this complete, brand-new handbook.

MAIL THIS COUPON

D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.
250 Fourth Avenue, N. Y. 3, N. Y.

Please send me "Practical Residential Wiring" on approval. Within 10 days I will either return the book without obligation or send you $1.95, plus a few cents postage, and $2.00 per month for 2 months thereafter. (If you send the entire amount of $5.95 with this coupon, we will pay the postage. Same return privilege and refund guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone ..... State .....

TFG—Mar. '40

Saves Costly Redecorating

AMAZING INVENTION. Banishes old-style housecleaning mess and muss. No rags—no sticky "dough"—no red, swollen hands. No more dangerous stepladders. Literally erases dirt like magic from Wallpaper, Painted Walls, Ceilings, Window Shades. *Take orders from friends! Earn money! Act now!*

SAMPLES FOR TRIAL Sample offer sent immediately to all who send name at once. A penny postal will do. SEND NO MONEY — *just your name.* KRISTEE CO., 1486 Bar Street, AKRON, OHIO

MIND POWER

A FREE BOOK

Develop your personal, creative power! Awaken the silent, sleeping forces in your own consciousness. Become Master of your own life. Push aside all obstacles with a new energy you have overlooked. The Rosicrucians know how, and will help you apply the greatest of all powers in man's control. Create health and abundance for yourself. Write for *Free* book, "The Secret Heritage." It tells how you may receive these teachings for study and use. It means the dawn of a new day for you. Address: Scribe J. D. J.

The Rosicrucians

SAN JOSE —AMORC— CALIFORNIA

"The Rosicrucians are NOT a religious organization"

THE FRONTIER POST

(Continued from page 6)

from growing the finest thoroughbred Hereford or from baking the most perfect loaf of bread or cake.

Somewhere about, on a big open space, you see the latest in farm machinery, and watch it demonstrated. The man that wrests a livelihood from the soil has to keep up with modern progress. A successful grower, these days, is just as concerned with production problems and costs as any manufacturer. Also, he has to know something about plant chemistry.

Talk with some of these stockmen and farmers, and you'll find a thoughtful, intelligent man, no matter what his schooling. The range and the farm are the new frontiers of science. The countryman lives by something more than the sweat of his brow. At the County Fair, he exchanges information with his neighbor. He proves what he knows by what he grows.

Entertainment Galore

But still that isn't all there is to the County Fair. When you're full up with information, there is entertainment galore. From the grandstand you watch horse racing, bronc busting and calf roping, and maybe a fireworks display each evening, along with some acrobat or trained dog acts, a good two hours of fun and resting your legs after wandering among the exhibits.

When that's over, you hear circusy sounds and smell sawdust and bright lights draw you to carnival row. Lots of road carnival outfits play the County Fair circuit. They come with all the old, familiar trappings—the rides, the sideshow tents with the barkers in front, the pitch games and all the catchpenny gimmicks that youngsters up to 80 enjoy.

And as you head for home, you come to a row of outdoor booths that small plumb irresistible of hot coffee, hot dogs and sure-enough homemade pie. These refreshment bazaars are run by the good ladies of the country churches, which get the proceeds.

It's too bad that everybody can't see a County Fair, the way they're put on from Texas west. It'd be a good thing for everybody to know what countryfolks do, think and talk about, don't you gals and galluses agree?

(Continued on page 10)

"I love to teach dancing

Lola Arnaux, typical Arthur Murray teacher

The New Arthur Murray Way

My pupils learn so much faster!

Even beginners become popular partners in a fraction of the usual time!

"I'm so excited about 'The New Arthur Murray Way' of teaching dancing. It seems like magic the way the Fox Trot, Waltz, Samba, Rumba, all develop out of his new discovery, 'The First Step To Popularity'.

"Beginners are thrilled to find they go dancing after only one hour . . . and amazed how little it costs to learn. And right now we have a special half-off price that saves you even more. But why don't you come in to the Studio for a FREE dance analysis and see for yourself what 'The New Arthur Murray Way' can do for you."

"The Rumba's a great favorite," says Madeleine Murphy. "It's such fun to see a beginner do this gay dance after just one lesson. Teaching really is fun this new way."

"The Samba's such fun and looks so tricky that everybody loves to do it," says Joyce Lyons. "And, you can learn it in an hour thanks to 'The New Arthur Murray Way.'"

PROOF You Can Dance After One Lesson!

See how quickly you can learn to dance "The New Arthur Murray Way." Send for the "Murray-Go-Round" now! It contains fascinating, entertaining instructions on all dances. Clip coupon below.

Copr. 1949—Arthur Murray Inc.

ONLY 25¢

ARTHUR MURRAY

DANCE STUDIOS FROM COAST TO COAST

Visit the one nearest you for a FREE dance analysis

ARTHUR MURRAY STUDIOS, Dept. 19B (Consult telephone directory for address of nearest studio, or write Arthur Murray Studios, 11 East 43rd St., New York 17, N.Y.) Please send me your magazine, "Murray-Go-Round", 44 pages of pictures, dance news, instructions. I enclose 25c.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ ZONE_____ STATE_____

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. $6

Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Easier Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc. —How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lath—lay floors—How to paint.

AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.
Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If OK I will remit $1 in 7 days and $1 monthly until $6 is paid. —Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name_____

Address_____

Occupation_____

Employed by_____ PAL

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for Business Success and LARGER PERSONAL EARNINGS. 40 years expert instruction — over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK NOW — "Law and Executive Guidance."

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 12-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

GET EYE-GLASSES by MAIL

Send No Money!

16-DAY TRIAL Offer

NEWEST STYLES

NEW LOW PRICES

Send for FREE Scientific Sight Test Chart and Catalog. Write today.

U.S. EYE-GLASSES CO. 1557 MILWAUKEE AVENUE Dept. 3-82, CHICAGO 22, ILL.

Thousands Deaf Now Hear

News of an astonishing new radionic† hearing device is sweeping the country as thousands experience the miracle of a return to the joy and thrill of hearing. Perfected in the great Zenith† Radio laboratories, it needs no fitting. You can order by mail on ten days' free trial* with absolute money-back guarantee. Ready to wear the day you get it. Send postcard today for full particulars to Zenith Radio Corp., Hearing Aid Division, Dept. TZ-39, 5801 Dickens Ave., Chicago 39, Illinois. Made by the makers of world-famous Zenith Radios.

**Trial offer available on direct sales by Zenith Radio Corporation or its subsidiaries.* †®

THE FRONTIER POST

(Continued from page 8)

The other day I heard a man say:

"I thought I knew how to talk my own lingo—until I started to study a foreign language."

The peculiar dips, twists and turns in American speech must mystify newcomers to our country. It's full of hard-to-explain contradictions. For instance, we say that a deal "goes through" when it succeeds, that it "falls through" when it fails.

A shipment goes by rail, not ship, and a cargo goes by ship, not car. Rainfall and fall rain aren't the same. A house afire "burns up" and also "burns down." We say goose and geese, why not moose and meese? A chemist who assays ore is an assayer, but one who writes essays is an essayist.

It isn't our long words that are the hardest. One of the longest words in our language, interdenominationalism, is easy to understand. But how many know the meaning of "gambit," which is a gambling stake, and "pundit," a very wise hombre. A machine is efficient, but a man is proficient, speaking correctly.

When you're "tired out" you're also "all in" and "done up" but when tricked you're "done in." You're "done for" if killed. The word "catch is used in various confusing ways. We "catch on" to a joke, "catch up" with work, and catch fish, colds, balls and the dickens. A dishonest man is "underhanded" but an honest man isn't overhanded, he's "aboveboard." And so on.

You can think of a lot more.

There's some consolation in knowing that other languages besides English have tricky words and phrases. Texans, lots of whom know some Spanish, can tell you that language is full of idioms untranslatable to our own tongue.

The Most Patient Critter

Here's a campfire subject that came up awhile back. What's the most patient animal?

A horse or burro, some say. Or a dog. Others claim that a cat has more patience than any other critter, because it can wait for hours at a hole to nab a mouse.

Being a close observer of cats, I'd say that it hasn't any more patience than a horse, dog,

(Continued on page 92)

You receive all parts, including tubes, for building this modern Superheterodyne Receiver and other standard equipment to use at home.

Learn RADIO TELEVISION, ELECTRONICS by SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING

Let NATIONAL SCHOOLS, of Los Angeles, a practical Technical Resident Trade School for almost 50 years, train you for today's unlimited opportunities in Radio

these two **FREE** *books will tell you how*

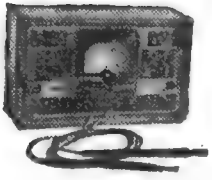
Good Jobs Await the Trained Radio Technician

You are needed in the great, modern Radio, Television and Electronics industry! Trained Radio technicians are in constant and growing demand at excellent pay—in Broadcasting, Communications, Television, Radar, Research Laboratories, Home Radio Service, etc. National Schools Master Shop Method Home Study course, with newly added lessons and equipment, can train you in your spare time, *right in your own home, for* these exciting opportunities. Our method has been proved by the remarkable success of National Schools-trained men all over the world.

You Learn by Building Equipment with Standard Radio Parts We Send You

Your National Schools Course includes not only basic theory, but practical training as well—you learn by doing. We send you complete standard equipment of professional quality for building various experimental and test units. You advance step by step until you are able to build the modern superheterodyne receiver shown above, which is yours to keep and enjoy. You perform more than 100 experiments—build many types of circuits, signal generator, low power radio transmitter, audio oscillator, and other units. The Free Books shown above tell you more about it—send for them today!

Now! NEW PROFESSIONAL MULTITESTER INCLUDED!



This versatile testing instrument is portable and complete with test leads and batteries. Simple to operate, accurate and dependable. You will be able to quickly locate trouble and adjust the most delicate circuits. You can use the Multitester at home or on service calls. It is designed to measure AC and DC volts, current, resistance and decibels. You will be proud to own and use this valuable professional instrument.

GET THE DETAILS—SEND THE COUPON →

Lessons and Instruction Material Are Up-to-date, Practical, Interesting

National Schools Master Shop Method Home Training gives yo basic and advanced instruction in all phases of Radio, Televisio and Electronics. Each lesson is made easy to understand by nu merous illustrations and diagrams. All instruction material ha been developed and tested in our own shops and laboratorie under the supervision of our own engineers and instructors. A free sample lesson is yours upon request—use the coupon below

You Get This and Other Valuable Information in the Fre Sample Lesson!

1. Basic Receiver Circuits and How They are Used.
2. Construction of the Antenna Circuit.
3. How Energy is Picked Up by the Aerial.
4. How Signal Currents are Converted into Sound.
5. How the Tuning Condenser Operates.
6. How the R-F Transformer Handles the Signal, and other data, with diagrams and illustrations.

Both Home Study and Resident Training Offered

APPROVED FOR VETERANS
Check Coupon Below

NATIONAL SCHOOLS

LOS ANGELES 37, CALIF. • EST. 1905

FIND OUT NOW... MAIL COUPON TODAY

National Schools, Dept. PPG-3 — Paste on a postcard
4000 S. Figueroa, Los Angeles 37, Calif.

Mail me FREE the books mentioned in your ad including a sample lesson of your course. I understand no salesman will call on me.

NAME ..... AGE.....

ADDRESS .....

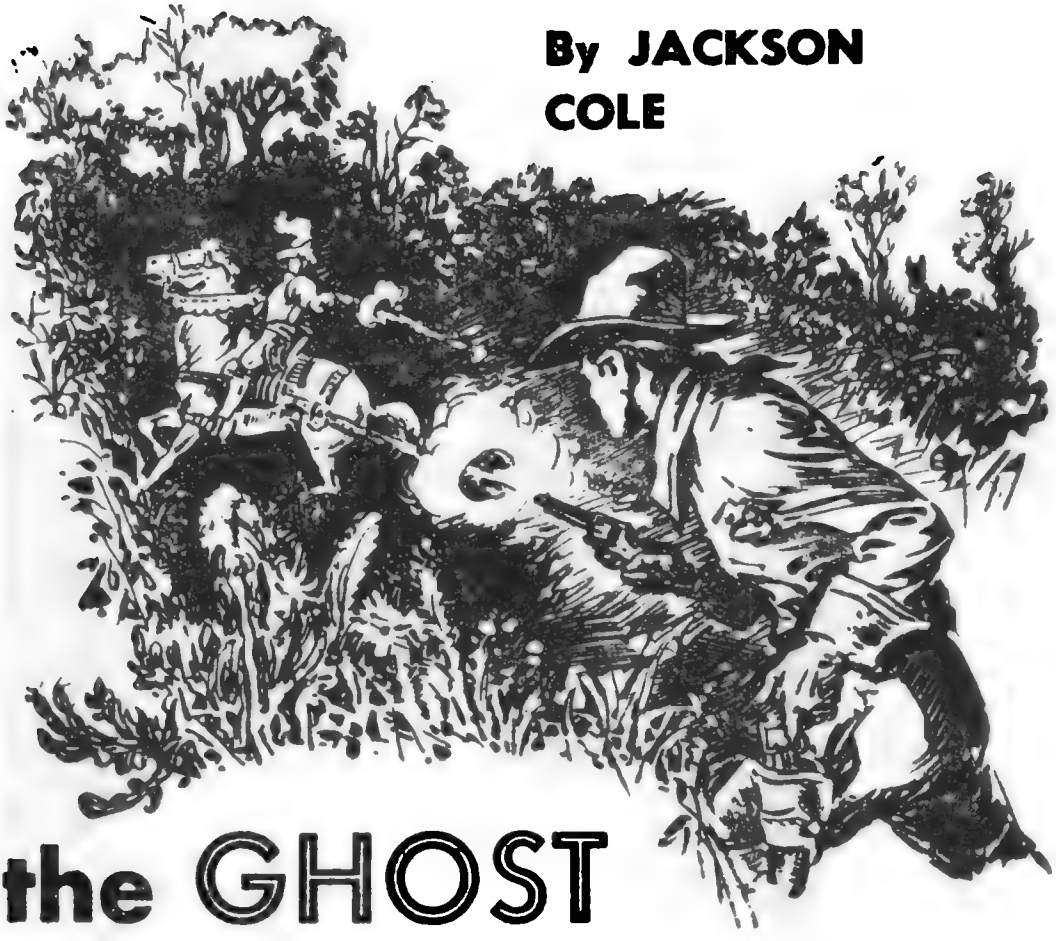
CITY ..... ZONE..... STATE.....

☐ Check here if Veteran of World War II

FLOODS BRING TROUBLE TO TOWN BUT THEN...
CALLING KWX, FERNCLIFF! EMERGENCY MESSAGE FOR CITY HOSPITAL / PLEASE FLY IN 200 AMPULES TYPHOID VACCINE. URGENT / DOCTOR G. EVERTS, RIVERDALE. REPEAT...
KWX, FERNCLIFF. OKAY. WILL HANDLE!
THEIR LAND COMMUNICATIONS CUT AND WATER SUPPLY CONTAMINATED BY FLOODS, RIVERDALE'S CITIZENS ARE UNDERGOING MASS INOCULATION, BUT YOUNG DOCTOR EVERT'S SERUM SUPPLY IS RUNNING LOW AND...
RIVERDALE AIRPORT TO PIPER 237: RUNWAYS FLOODED. LAND ON HIGH GROUND BETWEEN FLARES. OVER
HERE'S THE SERUM, DOC. THIS YOUNG LADY...
GOOD! WE CAN USE HER! HELP THE SERGEANT LINE 'EM UP, MISS!
B-B-BUT...
ONLY FIFTEEN MORE, DOCTOR
THANK HEAVENS THAT PILOT BROUGHT FIFTY EXTRA AMPULES
Eight Hours Later
ME ON YOUR NEWSCAST? GOSH, I WAS JUST GOING HOME AND CLEAN UP
DO IT AT THE STUDIO. NOW TO FIND THAT SERUM PILOT
WAIT 'TILL THE DOCTOR FINDS OUT IT'S ME!
HERE'S A RAZOR, DOCTOR
THANKS
REMARKABLE BLADE! I'VE NEVER HAD A MORE REFRESHING SHAVE!
IT'S A THIN GILLETTE... PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING
YOU FLEW THE SERUM! WHY...
BUT YOU NEEDED HELP...
QUIET! TEN SECONDS TO GO
M-M-M-M- HANDSOME
WHEN IT COMES TO FAST, SLICK SHAVES AT A SAVING, THIN GILLETTES ARE TOPS. THEY ARE THE MOST POPULAR LOW-PRICED BLADES ON THE MARKET BECAUSE THEY'RE KEENER AND LAST LONGER. THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY...PROTECT YOU FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
THIN Gillette 10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢
NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

"No Rangers wanted South of the Nueces," the killer warned, and that's just why the Lone Wolf Ranger headed that way!

By JACKSON COLE



the GHOST in GOLDEN ARMOR

A JIM HATFIELD NOVEL

CHAPTER I

Range of No Return!

A BULLET HOLE punctured the Texas Ranger badge pinned to the rider's shirt. The fabric was stiff and black with an incrustation of blood which had been days in the drying.

Pleated rawhide bridle reins had been looped twice around the dead Ranger's wrists and tied to his dish-shaped Brazos saddle-horn, giving the illusion that Hube Overmile had guided his *grulla* stud back home with those wooden-stiff, waxlike hands.

But the homing instinct had brought the horse back to its corral behind the Ranger post here in Sollazzo. Somewhere, out in

JIM HATFIELD RIDES IN TO CHALLENGE THE

the unmapped "suicide strip" of *brasada* country between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, Overmile had kept a tryst with Destiny. Only the *grulla* had survived his rider's rendezvous with ambush death, to bring the dead lawman back from the mysterious reaches of the thicket jungles to the corral from which they had started, three weeks before.

Otie Jennings, the aging lieutenant of Texas Rangers whose line-of-duty infirmities had relegated him to a desk job here at Sollazzo district headquarters, was the only man who actually saw Hube Overmile's grisly homecoming. It was siesta time in the little town which squatted like a woodtick scar on a bull's hide, an oasis in the middle of a thorny *brasada* desert which extended from horizon to horizon. The Mexican population dozed in the shade of their mud-and-wattle *jacal* huts; the few American residents took their ease in hammocks and cane-bottomed chairs under the awning of Sollazzo's mercantile store.

Into this curdled silence Hube Overmile's *grulla* came, hoofs bleeding, noiseless on the blow-sand which carpeted the jungle trail. The exhausted horse followed the adobe wall of the corral and plunged its muzzle gratefully into the brimming sheet-iron water trough, causing its dead rider to lurch grotesquely in saddle.

Peering through the open window of the Ranger station, Lieutenant Otie Jennings thought at first that Overmile was slumped in his saddle through over-exertion, his body juices drained by the punishing July heat. Then he spotted the flies buzzing around the bloodstains under Overmile's law badge.

"Three dead Rangers in six months," Jennings groaned, heading for the back door of his office. "The Ghost in Golden Armor has struck ag'in. And I'm responsible for sendin' 'em out into the *brasada* after the phantom. Providence, helping me, never again—"

THE *grulla* fought Jennings' efforts to force the animal to leave the water trough before it foundered. He noted that the horse's hoofs were worn to the frogs, two shoes missing, mouse-colored hide lacerated by Spanish dagger and thorny junco brush. This horse had been to Hades and back.

Cursing, Jennings pulled the *grulla* inside the Ranger barn, and set about untying the reins from the dead man's wrists —reins tied by his killer. Stiff as a mummy. Hube Overmile toppled from saddle, almost knocking the old Ranger down before he could support the dead man's weight.

A shadow fell through the doorway and a voice offered help.

"One moment there, Lieutenant Jennings. Let me assist you."

The low, well-modulated voice addressed Jennings from the arched maw of the stable. Struggling to maintain his balance under the dead man's weight while he worked to extricate a twisted boot from the oxbow stirrup, Jennings squinted his eyes against the blinding glare of the sunlight. He recognized the silhouetted figure stepping into the hay-carpeted interior of the barn.

The man was the celebrated Dr. Jonas Trevor, the German-born college professor who headed the department of history and archaeology over at the Alamo University in Austin. Engaged in scientific research in the *brasada* country, Dr. Trevor used Sollazzo as his base of supplies. The professor's buckboard wagon, with the words "ALAMO UNIVERSITY EXPEDITION NO. 2" painted on its end gate, was drawn up alongside the corral watering trough, while the team quenched their thirst, preparatory to starting the homeward trip.

"This here's—Hube Overmile, Doc," panted Jennings, when Trevor loosened the dead man's Coffeeville boot from the stirrup and helped lower the dead man to the floor of the stable. "The third Ranger I've sent to his death over in the Nueces thickets since last fall. And, by all that's holy, he'll be the last!"

Dr. Jonas Trevor turned away from the grisly corpse, rubbing his stomach as if sight of the slain Ranger nauseated him. He was a small man, this archaeologist

DEADLY SPECTRE THAT HAUNTS THE RANGE!

who had made his reputation in Europe before accepting a chair at the Alamo University. His head, growing bald, was covered by a tropical pith sun-helmet. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles which gave him an owlish appearance, his jaw's receding lines was offset by a ginger-colored beard, square-cut in the Prussian fashion.

JIM HATFIELD

He was wearing a white linen jacket, soiled now with Texas dust. His spindly legs looked incongruous in leather puttees and flaring whipcord breeches.

"I—know," Dr. Trevor said, forcing himself to turn around to where Jennings was squatting alongside the dead Ranger. "The last time I drove my wagon over from Haunted Lake, two months ago, you had given up Ranger Curtis Bjorquest for dead. And Ranger Ben Danefield before him. The *brasada* seems to be a range of no return for men wearing a law star, Lieutenant."

Jennings was going over the dead man's body, searching his pockets, inspecting the loaded cylinder of the six-gun which was still intact in Overmile's holster.

"This is the work of the Ghost in Golden Armor, of course," growled Otie Jennings, his face bleak in the semi-gloom of the Ranger barn. "The Ghost must have seen this Ranger badge on Hube's shirt and shot him at p'int-blank range. Hube Overmile was a foolhardy hombre to have wore his star."

Dr. Jonas Trevor removed a jade cigarette holder from his linen jacket, fitted a black Mexican *cigarillo* to it, and thrust the holder between his teeth. A mild-mannered man, dedicating his life to the pursuit of knowledge, Trevor's sensitive personality had obviously suffered a severe shock here in the presence of violent death.

"A fantastic thing, this Ghost of the Golden Armor," he whispered, firing his cigarette and inhaling deeply. "Had I not actually seen this—this fiend mounted on the white Arabian horse, clad in golden

armor in the style of Coronado's Spanish *conquistadores*, I would be arguing now that Mr. Overmile had been ambushed by an ordinary Mexican rustler or smuggler."

JENNINGS, having completed his examination of the dead man, had turned his attention to the jaded *grulla* stud. In the act of stripping the blood-stained saddle from the horse, the Ranger lieutenant caught sight of a sheet of paper glued to the back of Overmile's cantle, where it had been hidden by the skirt of the Ranger's brushhopper jumper.

Hanging the kack on a handy peg, Jennings ripped the paper from the leather, scanned it briefly, and mouthed an oath. He handed the paper to Dr. Trevor.

"This proves it beyond any doubt, Doc," declared the lieutenant. "Overmile was sent into the Suicide Strip with orders not to come back to Sollazzo till he had solved the mystery of the Ghost in Golden Armor. This is the Ghost's answer. He tied Overmile's carcass to the saddle and turned the *grulla* loose, knowin' the bronc would come back home. Well, the Ghost has licked me."

Trevor's hand shook as he squinted his myopic eyes at the words scribbled to the sheet of blue-ruled paper, graph paper such as a civil engineer might use. They read:

NO RANGERS WANTED SOUTH OF THE NUECES! BJORQUEST AND DANEFIELD, NOW OVERMILE. THEIR BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS, JENNINGS!
THE GHOST IN GOLDEN ARMOR

Jennings covered the dead man with a saddle blanket, and stumbled out of the stable. Dr. Trevor accompanied him along the corral fence to the Ranger post headquarters. There Jennings slumped into his swivel chair, hauled a bottle of whisky from his rolltop desk and downed a slug. He offered the bottle to Trevor, who hesitated a moment, then wiped off the neck of the bottle and took a drink, choking from the unaccustomed bite of the alcohol in his scrawny throat.

"First dram of rotgut I ever drank while I was on duty, Doc," Otie Jennings said hoarsely. "But this Ghost in Golden Armor business is drivin' me loco. This note is right. I knowed I was sendin' those three Rangers to their deaths, when I passed on the orders from Captain Bill McDowell in Austin. Well, by grab, it's the last man I'll send into the *brasada* after that spook. I'll resign my commission before I'll carry out any more of Roarin' Bill's orders."

Dr. Jonas Trevor leaned against the office wall, fanning his flushed, bony cheeks with his tropical helmet as he stared at the big blue-printed map of the "Suicide Strip." That *brasada*-jungled area lay between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, country over which Texas and Mexico had fought bloody battles, country which had first been explored by the Spanish conquerors under Coronado four hundred years before. History knew it for a no-man's land.

"I well remember my first encounter—my only encounter with the Ghost in Golden Armor," Trevor said musingly. A taciturn man, seldom given to speech, the archaeologist's tongue was loosened now, perhaps by the whisky which had warmed him. "It was six years ago, when I had just come to America, with Dr. Rudolph Gosche."

The Ranger lieutenant was caught in the spell of Trevor's magnetic voice as the spade-bearded man of science talked on, his eyes mystic in revery.

"We had reason to believe that a vast treasure of Aztec gold had been dumped into Haunted Lake by early Spanish explorers when they found themselves surrounded by hostile Indians," Trevor was saying. "That was the motive for organizing the Alamo University's first expedition to the Nueces country—to drain that lake and survey the old Spanish routes of conquest north of the Rio Grande. The Ghost in Golden Armor killed every member of my party, terrorized my Mexican peons. I was lucky to have escaped with my own life. . . Poor Dr. Gosche! His bones were never recovered."

Jennings grunted skeptically.

"And now, six years later, you're back again," he commented. "Doc, you ain't superstitious, no more than I am. Yuh don't think this here monster in Spanish armor is really the spirit of a conqueror who's been dead for four hundred years, do yuh?"

Trevor's keen blue eyes met the Ranger's stare without blinking. The bony shoulders lifted under his linen coat.

"We got to strip your duds off pronto before those ants pick your bones," said Hatfield (CHAP. II)

"As our Mexican friends put it," he murmured, "*quien sabe?* Who knows? The leader of our first expedition, Dr. Rudolph Gosche, was not a superstitious man, but a cold, practical man of science. I myself saw him empty the magazine of a forty-five-seventy Remington at this Ghost in Golden Armor, at a ten-foot range. The bullets had no more effect than if they had been fired at a shadow, at a puff of smoke. Yet a forty-five-seventy is capable of penetrating a four-inch oaken plank."

JONAS TREVOR removed his pith helmet and fanned himself.

"Sometimes I wonder if we scientists really have scratched the surface of psychic phenomena, Mr. Jennings," he observed frankly. "What do we really know of reincarnation—spirits of the departed—telepathy?"

Long after the noted explorer had left Sollazzo in his wagon, the Ranger sat in his office, lost in thought. Finally he came to a decision. Over at the coroner's office he summoned that startled official to take charge of Ranger Overmile's remains.

Then, returning to his office, Jennings composed a telegram to the Chief of the Texas Rangers, "Roaring Bill" McDowell. Within the hour Jennings' defiant message was winging across the Lone Star State to Austin, via the wires of Overland Telegraph:

GHOST IN GOLDEN ARMOR SENT RANGER HUBERT OVERMILE BACK TO SOLLAZZO WITH A BULLET IN HIS HEART. ALSO MESSAGE DEFYING ME TO SEND ANY MORE RANGERS INTO THE HAUNTED LAKE REGION. IT WOULD REQUIRE A FULL COMPANY OF RANGERS TO SMOKE OUT THIS GHOST. I WILL RESIGN MY JOB RATHER THAN SEND ANOTHER MAN INTO THE BRASADA TO TRACK DOWN THE GHOST.

Next day, after Jennings returned from the sad duty of burying Overmile in the Sollazzo Mission cemetery, he found a coded telegram from Roaring Bill McDowell lying on his desk. Reaching for his code book, Jennings deciphered his chief's message, well realizing that it might contain the news of his own dismissal from the Texas Rangers, that body of intrepid lawmen whom Jennings had served for more than a decade.

Decoded, the message from headquarters read:

YOUR INSUBORDINATION OVERLOOKED. CANNOT SPARE ENTIRE COMPANY OF RANGERS TO TRACK DOWN GHOST IN GOLDEN ARMOR. INSTEAD, HAVE ASSIGNED MY BEST RANGER TO THIS MYSTERY. JIM HATFIELD, THE LONE WOLF. AM WILLING TO GIVE YOU TEN TO ONE ODDS THAT HATFIELD CRACKS THIS CASE AND DELIVERS THE GHOST'S SCALP TO YOUR OFFICE. DESTROY THIS WIRE AFTER DECODING.

WILLIAM M'DOWELL

Jennings felt his pulses race as he touched a match to the secret telegram. Jim Hatfield—the Lone Wolf! No Ranger in the service of the Lone Star State had a record that could remotely approach Hatfield's.

"I'll take the bet, Roarin' Bill," the Sollazzo Ranger whispered grimly. "The Ghost in Golden Armor can't be stopped by knife or bullet. For once you've handed the Lone Wolf an assignment he won't be returning from alive. Yuh've sent Jim Hatfield to an unmarked grave in the *brasada*, McDowell!"

CHAPTER II

Lone Wolf Ranger

PULLING up his magnificent golden sorrel on the north bank of the Nueces, Texas Ranger Jim Hatfield cuffed back his flat-crowned beaver Stetson and squinted against the Texas sunlight. He was sizing up the silt-laden river which twisted its way toward the Gulf of Mexico like a contorted artery swollen with blood.

He cut a dramatic shape against the backdrop of the Texas thickets, this lean and big-boned Ranger whose propensity for working without assistance had earned him the nickname of "Lone Wolf."

Scaling around one-eighty, Hatfield stood better than six feet without benefit of spike-heeled cowboots. His face, bronzed to the color of a mesquite bean by his life in the saddle, had a rugged, handsome look which men envied and which set women to dreaming. His eyes, the peculiar shade of green to be seen in

glacial ice, were his most prominent feature, black-lashed under ebon brows.

It was a stern face in repose, the high-bridged nose and prominent chin belying the Ranger's keen sense of humor. His wedge-shaped torso, slanting to narrow hips, was garbed in a work-softened hickory shirt. Saddle-warped thighs wore bibless levis, and a pair of black-stocked Colt Peace-makers were holstered at either flank, sagging the cartridge-studded gunbelts which crisscrossed his midriff.

There was a Winchester carbine, a .44-40 chambered for the same ammunition he used in his belt guns, reposing in the thorn-scarred boot under the Lone Wolf's saddle fender. He sat his golden sorrel with the lithe ease of a man to whom a saddle was a throne from which he dispensed frontier justice, without fear and without favoritism.

Scanning the south bank of the Nueces now, Hatfield picked out a man-made landmark amid the endless *brasada* jungles.

It was a brush corral, in which a score or more of longhorned ladino steers were bawling restively.

"That stock pen could belong to Quent Fremont's Rafter Q outfit, Goldy," Hatfield remarked to his mount, in the manner of a range rider who, for want of human company over extended periods of time, was given to addressing his horse. "Or it could be Buck Jarbo's Flyin' J outfit, dependin' on how far west we worked on our way to the Nueces."

Hatfield was two weeks out of Austin where he had received his orders from "Roaring Bill" McDowell, Ranger Chief. As usual, Hatfield had been given *carte blanche* for handling this latest assignment. For reasons of his own, the Lone Wolf had elected to approach the Suicide Strip from the north, instead of reporting first to Lieutenant Otie Jennings in Sollazzo. There might be spies in that cowtown who informed the Ghost in Golden Armor every time a Texas Ranger headed into the *brasada* country.

"There's not much to go on, Jim," McDowell had explained, after showing Hatfield the telegram from Jennings. "This so-called Ghost in Golden Armor is supposed to be the spirit of a Spanish explorer who was scalped by Injuns back in the Fifteen Hundreds when Coronado was huntin' for them fabled Seven Cities of Cibola.

"Legend says them *conquistadores* brought ten mule-loads of Montezuma's Aztec treasure with 'em out of Mexico. The Spaniards was massacreed at Haunted Lake. Ever since then this here Ghost in Golden Armor is supposed to circle the Lake every night on a phantom white horse, guardin' the Aztec gold the Spaniards dumped into Lago Espantosa. The devil of it is that no less a scientist than that famous Dr. Trevor of Alamo University—not a man likely to be superstitious—has seen this gold phantom.

So much for legend. In Hatfield's pocket now an army survey map of the Suicide Strip. Military engineers had no time for ghost stories. They recorded only cold facts on their charts. Espantosa Lake actually existed. It was part of a cattle ranch owned by a man named Quent Fremont, the Rafter Q. Flanking Rafter Q on the west was a cattle ranch known as the Flying J, owned by a notorious rustler named "Buck" Jarbo. Jarbo's name was prominent in Texas Ranger outlaw files.

"You remember Buck Jarbo," McDowell had said, and grinned at Hatfield. "Yuh should, since yuh dabbed yore loop on him six years ago. Sent him up for a five-year stretch in the Texas State pen at San Castrovito. This here Ghost in Golden Armor hasn't been reported anywheres but around Rafter Q and Flying J. While yuh're on this, it might be as well to remember that Buck Jarbo is out of prison, back on the Flyin' J. Yore back would make a good target for Jarbo."

SCANNING the ladino steers in the brush corral across the river, Jim Hatfield felt a rippling sensation prickle the hairs on the nape of his neck. Obviously, those cattle were being held here for branding. If those steers belonged to the Flying J—

"Buck Jarbo's swore to kill me next time our trails cross," the Lone Wolf thought, picking up his reins. "Even if I don't smoke this Ghost in Golden Armor out of his den, Jarbo ought to make this here sortie right interestin'."

Touching Goldy's flanks with blunt rowels, Hatfield put the big sorrel down the shale cutbank into the river. At this summer season the Nueces was at low ebb

and they were better than half way to the south bank before Goldy's hoofs left the gravel bottom and found swimming depth in the muddy channel.

The sluggish current carried them to an outjutting gravel bar fifty yards downstream from the cattle corral which occupied a clearing in the *brasada* jungle. Hatfield's Ranger star reposed in a secret pocket cunningly sewn into his levi belt. To all outward appearances, he was a drifting saddle tramp, fording the Nueces. If unseen eyes had watched him from the vicinity of that cattle corral, a law badge might have invited a bushwhack slug—as Overmile's star had done.

Reaching the high, dry ledge of the south bank, Hatfield unbuckled his saddle-bags and tried to orient himself, if possible, by the few landmarks noted on the Government survey map with which McDowell had supplied him back in Austin.

Far to the southwest, through the shimmering heat waves above the seas of *brasada*, Hatfield made out the jagged teeth of the Navajada mountain range which raised a backbone between the Nueces and Rio Grande watersheds. Checking the Navajadas, with the map unrolled across the saddle pommel, Hatfield came to the conclusion that he was on Quent Fremont's Rafter Q range. The mountains formed a background to Buck Jarbo's Flying J outfit.

"Which means we're within ten miles of the Haunted Lake, I reckon," the Lone Wolf mused. "And about ten miles beyond the lake is Sollazzo town. Mebbe I'll get around to payin' Lieutenant Jennings a visit before this business is finished."

His first objective, Hatfield decided, was to find a trail through the thorny brush which would take him to Haunted Lake. According to McDowell, he would find an Alamo University exploring expedition camped near the Lake, which Dr. Jonas Trevor planned to drain in search of Spanish conquerers' loot. This Dr. Trevor, one of the most famous archaeologists in the Lone Star State, was the only man known to have seen the Ghost in Golden Armor and lived to report that phantom's existence.

In the act of restoring his map to his left-hand *alforja* pouch, Hatfield was startled to hear a high-pitched scream of agony. It wafted out of the thickets upstream from the point where Goldy had forded the Nueces.

Dropping a hand to gun butt, Hatfield stiffened in saddle, the rustling *brasada* with acute ears. The scream, that of a man in mortal pain, was twice repeated. It came from somewhere beyond the cattle corral.

Palming a six-gun, Hatfield urged his golden sorrel up the riverbank ledge, the spiny *brasada* thickets clawing at him with lethal fingers as he passed. Once abreast of the brush corral, a quick glance at the bawling ladino steers inside it revealed that they wore no brands—young stuff recently popped out of the brush by a cowboy crew. Did they belong to Buck Jarbo?

Then, rounding the far corner of the corral, Hatfield spotted a branding iron hanging from a snubbing post. It was the Rafter Q. This, then, was an outpost of Quent Fremont's little ranch, whose range encompassed the haunted acres of Espantosa Lake.

A groaning off through the brush directed the Lone Wolf along a narrow trail leading from the brush corral. An inbred sense of caution prompted him to swing out of stirrups and head along the thicket-arched trail on foot, thumb alert on milled gunhammer.

THEN he was out of the clotted shadows of the *brasada*, faced by a small natural clearing in the brush where alkali in the soil had prevented the growth of vegetation. A flash of white, something moving on the opposite side of the clearing, caused Hatfield to swing his gaze to the southwest. He was in time to see a snow-white Arabian stallion, and the figure mounting the horse in this first flashing glimpse, appeared to be a figment of the Ranger's overwrought imagination. A rider clad in a Spanish helmet and breastplate, wearing iron gauntlets, his legs sheathed in metal cuisse and jambeau, feet in metal solleret shoes.

The rider's armor was a dazzling golden color, the plates giving off a musical jangling sound as he mounted.

"The Ghost in Golden Armor!"

Hatfield choked out the words, even as he saw the phantom of the *brasada* rein

the white stallion off into the brush. Swinging from the rider's flanks were a brace of ancient horse pistols, their butts glinting with rubies and other jewels, sunlight flashing off gold-plated flintlock hammers.

With a hoarse yell, Hatfield whipped up his Colt and laid a shot in the direction of the Ghost. He heard his slug carom off an armored thigh with a discordant note. He heard a startled curse.

Then the Ghost spurred into the screening chaparral and a gunshot breached the silence. A leaden ball whistled past the Lone Wolf's head.

The Ghost in Golden Armor, having loosed one shot from his horse pistols, was not choosing to stand and make a fight of it, despite the fact that Dr. Jonas Trevor had testified that the phantom rider was impervious to buckshot. Hatfield could hear the *blanco* Arabian's hoofs thundering off down a brush-masked trail, receding in the distance.

Hatfield's whistle brought Goldy out of the *brasada* brambles behind him. Hatfield was reaching for his reins with the intention of trailing the Ghost, when he caught sight of something which told him that pursuit of the Spanish phantom must be postponed.

Directly ahead of him, in the middle of the crossing, a man lay spread-eagled on the ground, arms and legs staked over an earthen mound which swarmed with huge Texas ants. This man's screams, then, had directed Hatfield to this scene of potential tragedy. The Ghost in Golden Armor had resorted to the old Indian torture trick of staking a man over an anthill to die in agony.

Racing over to the staked-down victim, Hatfield saw that he was a cowboy in his middle twenties, wearing bullhide chaps, a silk rodeo shirt and a calfhide vest. Ants were swarming over the man's face and arms and throat.

"'*Sta bueno*, friend," Hatfield panted. Jerking a bowie knife from his belt sheath he slashed the rawhide pigging strings which pinioned the cowhand's wrists and ankles. "We got to strip yore duds off pronto before those ants pick yore bones!"

Hatfield dragged the cowboy to his feet. Blood oozed from a livid welt on the young fellow's skull and the ants were feeding on the viscid crimson.

The Lone Wolf reared up to meet the bear's snarling lunge (CHAP. VII)

The cowboy was unsteady on his feet as Hatfield peeled off his vest and shirt, tossing them to one side. The Ranger was down on his knees, unbuckling the victim's bullhide chaps preparatory to helping the man strip off his levis and star boots when a grotesque sound grated from the waddy's lips:

"Can't strip—afore a woman, stranger."

Hatfield whirled, following the direction of the cowboy's unsteadily pointing hand.

There, bound to a *tepula* tree with a horsehair lariat, was a beautiful blonde, a girl who was gagged with a bandanna neckerchief.

CHAPTER III

Donna Weston

URGENT as the moment was, the Texas Ranger grinned. With ants searing his flesh, this cowboy had not forgotten his modesty.

"I see what yuh mean, son," Hatfield said. "The river's close. Skin down there and dive in before them ants bore through yore hide and blind your eyes and crawl up yore nostrils."

The cowboy, obviously in torture from the stings of the black insects, needed no prodding to obey. With a quick look over his shoulder at the bound girl at the edge of the clearing, he set off at a sprint for the Rio Nueces.

Swatting ants from his own sleeves, the Lone Wolf Ranger skirted the seething anthill and crossed the clearing to the girl. His knife was ready for his second rescue job of the day.

At closer view, she was even more beautiful than Hatfield's first impression of her. Her slim, curved body was clad in a blue workshirt and waist overalls. Taffy-brown boots encased her small feet, to which were buckled small Spanish spurs with butterfly rowels.

Rounding the *tepula* trunk, Hatfield cut the reata which bound her to the tree, quickly unwinding the rope until she was able to stagger forward. Her knees wobbled and Hatfield leaped to support her in the curve of a powerful arm.

She was making inarticulate sobbing sounds behind her gag as Hatfield unknotted the bandanna and let it fall free, to reveal her face framed in clustering ringlets of spun-gold. She clung to him nervously, fighting back hysteria.

"Just what kind of a ruckus did I stumble onto, ma'am?" Hatfield asked, and grinned to give her confidence. "Looks like the Ghost in Golden Armor had picked himself another couple of victims, leavin' yore boy friend staked out to an anthill and you tied up to starve."

The girl shuddered spasmodically. Hatfield led her over to a shady spot and lowered her gently to the ground.

After a moment she turned her lustrous blue eyes on him. A pulse hammered in the little hollow at the base of her throat, her chest lifting and falling rapidly.

"You saved us both from horrible deaths, Mr.—"

The Lone Wolf doffed his Stetson, running splayed fingers through his shock of curly, jet-black hair.

"Yuh can call me Slim-Jim, ma'am," he offered. "Just a tumbleweed puncher driftin' through the Nueces country huntin' for work."

The girl's eyes sharpened momentarily. When a man didn't divulge his name it usually meant he was on the dodge.

"I'm Donna Weston," she introduced herself. "My father is Dr. Jonas Trevor's assistant over at Haunted Lake. The Alamo University expedition plans to drain the lake."

"Slim-Jim" nodded, his own interest quickening.

"Professor Luke Watson," he said. "I've heard of yore father, Miss Watson. He's the writer of several books about Texas—the Chisholm Trail times, the defense of the Alamo, the lives of Sam Houston and Stephen Austin. I've read 'em all."

Donna's altering expression revealed her surprise at this man's revelation of the fact that, for a wandering saddle tramp—perhaps a rider of the owlhoot trail—this Slim-Jim had a better than average education. Saddle bums were hardly the type to enjoy Prof. Weston's erudite tomes on Texas history.

"The young man you found staked to that horrible ant-hill," she said, "was my fiancé—Quentin Fremont."

Hatfield's brows arched. He decided not

to reveal that he knew a thing or two about young Fremont—that he owned the Rafter Q iron, and had legal title to Haunted Lake. As long as he played the rôle of a tumbleweed cowboy, he could not betray too much knowledge of local persons and places.

"Just what happened here?" he asked gravely. "Wasn't that the killin' Ghost in Golden Armor I swapped lead with just now? Start at the beginnin'—tell me."

DONNA WESTON swabbed perspiration from her face with the bandanna with which the *brasada* phantom had gagged her.

"Quent had corraled those steers in the corral there," she said hoarsely, "and planned to brand them today. I rode over from the Rafter Q with him—Dr. Trevor's expedition is living at Quent's ranch while he and Dad superintend the digging of this drainage ditch to empty Espantosa Lake. The University believes the lake hides the secret of priceless Aztec treasure, you know."

Hatfield shook his head impatiently.

"I'm more interested," he prompted her gently, "with what happened to you and Fremont."

She smiled apologetically.

"There's not much to tell, Mr. Slim-Jim," she said, shuddering at the memories of her recent ordeal. "When we reached the corral, this Ghost in Golden Armor was waiting for us. He attacked Quent from ambush, knocked him over the head with one of those horse pistols. Mr. Slim-Jim, those—those Spanish flintlock pistols he had once belonged to Dr. Rudolphe Gosche, the German scientist! I've seen them many times. You may know that Dr. Gosche was killed six years ago by this Ghost in Golden Armor."

Hatfield lifted a hand to silence the digression.

"I'm not carin' where the Ghost got his firearms," he admonished. "The Ghost knocked Fremont out. Then what?"

Donna Weston buried her face in her hands.

"He—he forced me over to this clearing and tied me to this tree with Quent's lariat. Then he dragged poor Quent over to that ant-hill and staked him out, like the Comanches used to do."

Hatfield tugged his lower lip thoughtfully. Fremont, it was obvious, had come to his senses when the ants had begun stinging his flesh. His screams had brought Hatfield to the scene. If he had appeared one minute earlier, the Lone Wolf knew, he would have proved to his own satisfaction that the phantom's golden armor was not impervious to Colt slugs.

"Yore future husband should be in shape to see yuh now, Miss Donna," Hatfield said gravely, helping her to her feet. "Let's go down to the river and have some *habla* with Fremont."

Immediately she headed down the trail which led to the Rafter Q steer corral. Hatfield tarried to pick up Fremont's shirt, vest and discarded sombrero, shaking the swarming ants from the garments.

Goldy ambled after the Lone Wolf as he headed down the trail past the corral. Off to one side, Hatfield noticed two saddle horses—a dun bearing the Rafter Q brand, and a small calico pony which he judged was Donna Weston's mount. They were grazing near the river bank.

Hatfield reached the Nueces in time to see Quent Fremont scrambling out on the muddy ledge where he and Donna embraced impulsively. The young rancher's chest and back were mottled with ant bites and his face was already beginning to swell grotesquely where the insects had stung his cheeks and lips and forehead. Otherwise, the rugged young cowman seemed to have escaped injury from his brush with the Ghost in Golden Armor, and he managed a smile when Donna introduced him to Hatfield.

"Yuh had a close call, Fremont," Hatfield said over their handshake. "I've seen men's flesh picked clean to the bones by these Texas ants. Why should the Ghost be out to kill yuh, son? And why should he have left yore fianceé to starve to death?"

Fremont laughed shakily, his arm circling Donna's waist.

"To tell the truth, I never believed there *was* a ghost gallivantin' around my range in golden armor, Slim-Jim," the Rafter Q boss said gruffly. "I thought Doc Trevor was loco, spreadin' the story all over Texas how this Ghost wiped out the first University expedition six years ago. But after today I'm changin' my story." Fremont's voice trailed off on a shuddering note.

While he was shrugging into his shirt and vest, Jim Hatfield removed makings from his pockets and shaped a cigarette.

"The Ghost is real enough," he muttered. "And those weren't ghost guns he was wearin'."

"I know that!" cut in Donna. "I told you I recognized those horse pistols. They were antique Spanish pieces that Dr. Gosche picked up in Barcelona, before he came to America. That's proof right there to back up Dr. Trevor's story about Gosche having been killed by the Ghost in Golden Armor."

FIRING his quirly, Jim Hatfield let his mind wander on to other things, known facts with which Roaring Bill McDowell had supplied him. His line of reasoning traveled in a circle, inevitably winding up at Buck Jarbo, the ex-convict who owned the neighboring Flying J range.

"Tell me somethin', Fremont," Hatfield said suddenly. "I'm a stranger in these parts, but I understand that an hombre named Buck Jarbo is yore neighbor. Jarbo was jailed for five years after the Texas Rangers caught him shovin' wetbacks across the Rio Grande. Is this Buck Jarbo back in his old stampin' grounds?"

Fremont grinned wrily. "Jarbo's back at the Flyin' J, all right," he said, a trace of anger thickening his voice. "Jarbo bushwacked my dad when he first homesteaded the Rafter Q. The only peace I've had was durin' the five years Jarbo was behind bars."

Through pluming cigarette smoke, Hatfield eyed Fremont.

"Since Jarbo got back to his home spread, has he caused the Rafter Q any trouble, Quent?"

Fremont nodded grimly. "Plenty. He's rustled my stock, vented my brands. Jarbo's served notice that he wants to water his beef at Haunted Lake, which same is on my land. Before he's through, Jarbo says he'll run me out of Texas. It's a long-standing feud, Slim-Jim, this ruckus between Jarbo and the Rafter Q."

A vagrant thought was running through the Lone Wolf's head, but he kept silent. Behind the Ghost's helmet visor, he was willing to bet his last blue chip, would be found the leering visage of Buck Jarbo.

"I'm in no shape to go on with my job of brandin' those steers," Fremont's voice cut through Hatfield's thoughts. "Donna and me are headin' back to the Rafter Q."

The girl, nestling her blond tresses against Fremont's shoulder, put in swiftly:

"Mr. Slim-Jim's a cowboy looking for work, Quent. You're short-handed on the Rafter Q, you know."

Fremont's candid gray eyes sized up Hatfield. He shook his head.

"Any man who rides for the Rafter Q is marked for death, Jim—at the hands of this Ghost, if not from Buck Jarbo's wild bunch. I wouldn't have the gall to ask yuh to hang yore hat in my bunkhouse."

Hatfield flicked his cigarette stub into the river. Here was a golden opportunity, not to be lost. He had come to the Nueces country to track down the Ghost in Golden Armor. What better chance would he have than to become a Rafter Q rider, concealing the fact that he was a Texas Ranger?

"This Ghost slung some hot lead my direction this mornin'," he said gravely. "That sort of deals me a hand in this game, yuh might say. If it's all the same to you, I'd like to rent my lass' rope to the Rafter Q."

DONNA WESTON squeezed Fremont's arm. The young rancher cleared his throat, his brow furrowing.

"You understand how cattle ranchin' is out here in the *brasada*, Slim-Jim. It's devilish hard work poppin' steers out of these thorns. And I couldn't meet a payroll until after fall beef gather."

Hatfield grinned. He had no interest in collecting money for the work he did on the Rafter Q. With Texas in such desperate need for the services of her Rangers, he knew he would either solve the Ghost mystery or become Boot Hill bait long before the autumn roundup.

"My offer still goes," the Ranger said. "Let's say I like this brush country—the quiet and all."

Quent Fremont flashed Hatfield a quizzical look. The man's thoughts were obvious. He had no desire to make the Rafter Q the hideout of a man outside the law. On the other hand, both he and the girl he intended to marry owed their lives to this handsome young range rider.

Fremont thrust out a rope-callused hand.

"Yuh're hired, Slim-Jim!" he said. "Who yuh are or what yuh're doin' in the Suicide Strip is no never-mind to me. Donna trusts yuh, and what she thinks goes a long way with me. I got a hunch yuh'll do to ride the river with!"

CHAPTER IV

Harsh Words at Haunted Lake

THERE was something about the Texas *brasada* to grate on the nerves of a man who was used to the wide open spaces of the Llano Estacado. The brush was higher than the head of a mounted man, restricting visibility to a scant few yards of trail. It was a country ideal for ambush.

The Ghost of Golden Armor had fled from the scene of his fiendish activity this morning, after one of Hatfield's .44 slugs had ricocheted off his armored thigh. But what was to prevent the *brasada* phantom from reining off into the thickets and picking them off from ambush?

An uneasy sense needled Hatfield as he rode Goldy along the trail behind Quent Fremont, with the girl bringing up the rear on her calico pony. His hand was never far from gun-butt, her eyes shuttling into the sinister shadows of the *brasada* jungle on either side of the trail.

Five miles from the Nueces the *brasada* ended abruptly at the base of a talus slope which led to a caprock plateau. Remembering the map he carried in his saddlebags, the Ranger realized that this was the open stretch of country which formed the heart of the Rafter Q and the Flying J.

This mesa, forming an island in the blue-gray sea of the thickets, was the domain of the Ghost in Golden Armor. Aboriginal Indians, before the dawn of history, had first penetrated the *brasada* to find this land. Spanish *conquistadores*, coming up from Mexico, flushed with the pillage of an Aztec civilization, had camped on this mesa while searching for the treasures of Cibola, their expeditions extending as far west as California and as far north as what was now Nebraska. The first cattle and horses to stock this primitive continent were strays from the expeditions of these Spaniards.

"There's Lago Espantosa—the Haunted Lake," called out Quent Fremont, hipping around in saddle as they topped the rimrock trail. "The only good waterin' place between the Rio Grande and the Nueces. That's why Buck Jarbo is out to ruin the Rafter Q."

Jim Hatfield's green eyes narrowed with interest as he squinted off across the open flats toward a shimmering mirror of turquoise waters, half a mile distant. Haunted Lake—known as an abode of ghosts since the dawn of time—did not appear sinister in the westering Texas sunlight.

The water, sparkling with a million diamond points as a breeze off the rocky Navajadas ruffled its surface, reflected the dull bulwark of *brasada* beyond its southern shoreline. Perhaps fifty acres

[*Turn page*]

HEADACHE
UPSET STOMACH
JUMPY NERVES
RELIEF!
THANKS TO FAMOUS BROMO-SELTZER
Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast, pleasant help. Caution: Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.
BROMO SELTZER

in extent, fed from underground sources, Haunted Lake was of incalculable worth to any rancher. Hatfield could see why Quent Fremont was prepared to lay down his life to defend the water of Haunted Lake from Buck Jarbo.

Donna Weston rode her pinto alongside Goldy. Her slim bronzed hand pointed to the western end of the lake, where a beehive of activity was visible.

"Trevor's project," she said.

Sisal-hatted Mexican *pelados,* the gangs of workmen numbering perhaps thirty, were engaged in digging a ditch from the north side of Lago Espantosa to the rim of the mesa. From a distance, Jim Hatfield could see that the giant excavation project was nearly finished.

The ditch, ten feet deep, had been gouged out of the flinty adobe soil by gangs of Mexicans employing fresno scrapers drawn by mules and oxen. When the ditch tapped Lago Espantosa, its waters would come rushing toward the valley of the Nueces by the force of gravity, to spill over the mesa rim behind them.

"I shouldn't think yuh'd want to see yore water-hole drained, Senor Fremont," Hatfield commented. "What will yore stock do for water? The Nueces gets pretty dry in drought season."

Fremont, his face a swollen caricature now that the ant poison had begun to show its effect, grinned confidently.

"Dr. Trevor's expedition is temporary," he pointed out. "The Lake can be drained in a day's time, since it's shallow. Alamo University believes the early-day Spaniards dumped a fortune in Aztec gold in that lake, when the explorers found themselves about to be massacred by Indians. If that is true, the University will make an important contribution to history."

JIM HATFIELD glanced from Fremont to the girl at his other stirrup. The love affair between this professor's daughter and this rugged young *brasada* rancher had obviously blossomed during the months while the University field expedition had been engaged in digging this drainage ditch.

"Yuh'll share in that Aztec treasure, I reckon, if it is found by emptyin' Haunted Lake," Hatfield drawled. "After all, the lake belongs to you."

Quent Fremont shook his head. "Yuh don't understand, Slim-Jim." The young rancher grinned. "That Aztec treasure may be worth millions, yes. But it ain't for sale. The gold and jewels Dr. Trevor and Professor Weston think they will find belongs in the University museum. All I'm interested in is seein' this drainage ditch dammed up again, so the lake will fill up again. I don't want to get rich—that way."

The Ranger laughed. His respect for Donna Weston's future husband jumped a hundred per cent at this disclosure of the rancher's sterling character.

"When the expedition leaves, I reckon Miss Donna will stay here in the *brasada* with you," the Ranger said. "That's treasure enough for one man, eh, Quent?"

They had followed the drainage ditch to its end, some fifty yards short of tapping the shores of Haunted Lake. Swarthy-faced Mexican workmen, clad in dirty *camisas* and ragged *pantalones,* eyed the three riders stolidly, leaning on shovel handles and scraper bars.

SUPERINTENDING the work was a lone American, wearing a shabby Panama hat against the heat of the day, bibless overalls and mud-caked boots.

As Fremont and the girl led Jim Hatfield up to where the scientist was conferring with the Mexican *segundo* in charge of the excavation gangs, Hatfield saw at a glance that this was not the famous Dr. Jonas Trevor. This man was obviously Donna's father, Professor Weston. He had the same ice-blue eyes, the same straw-colored hair and cast of features.

Dismounting, Donna kissed her father and turned to where Jim Hatfield was swinging out of stirrups. Luke Weston's glance slid off the Ranger and focused on Quent Fremont's swollen, red-mottled face.

"Great Scott, Fremont, you look like the wrath of Hades!" ejaculated the scientist grumpily. "What you see in this young man is beyond me, Donna. Is he coming down with smallpox?"

Fremont grinned ruefully. Hatfield found himself forming a sudden dislike for Prof. Luke Weston. The man seemed to have a waspish temper. Whether he actually disapproved of his daughter's marriage to this back-country cowboy,

the Ranger could not decide at first glance.

"I tangled with the Ghost in Golden Armor, Prof," grunted the Rafter Q owner. "He staked me to an ant-hill. I got bit up considerable."

Prof. Weston's jaw dropped. A slow flush of color rose in his scrawny neck as he turned to scowl at his daughter.

"The Ghost!" he scoffed. "You've been listening to Doc Trevor once too often, both of you. If I thought such a ghost existed, do you think I would let you marry this young whippersnapper and remain here, Donna?"

She was obviously embarrassed by her father's disdain of Quent in front of a stranger. Briefly, she described the morning's misadventure, winding up her account by beckoning Jim Hatfield to come forward.

"This is the man who saved our lives, Dad," she said. "Slim-Jim, my father, Professor Weston. Slim-Jim has read all your dull books, Dad."

Weston extended a sun-bronzed hand, its joints knotted with arthritis. Hatfield was aware of an undercurrent of animosity emanating from Weston as the archaeologist sized him up.

"Slim-Jim?" the Professor said testily. "What kind of a name is that?"

The Texas Ranger shrugged.

"Slim-Jim's my monicker, Professor. Any objections?"

WESTON jerked back his hand and mopped his face with a grimy handkerchief.

"Blast a man who hides his full name. An outlaw, are you? Hiding out in this country because you're wanted by the Rangers? Is that it, Slim-Jim?"

Donna Weston blushed, anger blazing in her eyes.

"Dad!" she admonished. "This man saved our lives, I tell you! What's in a name, after all?"

Luke Weston wheeled away without offering any apology or expressing any gratitude for Hatfield's having rescued his daughter. His manner testified that he had not believed a word of Donna's fantastic story concerning the Ghost in Golden Armor.

A man of science, Prof. Weston had no time to waste on fantasy.

As Weston strode over to where his Mexican foreman stood at the edge of the drainage ditch, the Ranger made a mental note of the fact that the Professor favored his left leg, limping as if he was slightly crippled.

Reaching his foreman, Weston turned to shake a bony fist at his daughter.

"Mind you, Donna, I'll not have you consorting with any renegade like this Slim-Jim!" he stormed. "It's bad enough that I brought you along on this expedition to begin with. If I'd had any idea you'd fall in love with the starving cowboy who happens to own Haunted Lake—"

Donna stepped into stirrup and mounted her pinto.

"Overlook what Dad says, Slim-Jim," she apologized to the Ranger. "Beneath his rough exterior, he is really a charming and learned man."

Leaving the scene of the excavation activities, the three riders skirted the west end of Haunted Lake. Hatfield saw an army field tent pitched on the lake shore, beside which was a buckboard loaded with supplies. A spade-bearded oldster in a tropical pith helmet was seated in the shade of the open tent, poring over a chart, with a younger man wearing high laced boots and an engineer's flat-brimmed sombrero seated beside him.

"That's the famous Doctor Trevor," Donna informed Hatfield. "The only man who survived the Ghost in Golden Armor six years ago, when the Gosche expedition was massacred. The man with him is our surveyor, Charlie Cameron. Charlie's job is to map the old Spanish conquest trails through this country."

Jim Hatfield experienced a surge of relief when they rode on past Trevor's tent. He had had enough of crusty scientists for one day. Later, he planned to quiz Jonas Trevor regarding the ill-fated Gosche expedition, and Trevor's experiences with the Ghost in Golden Armor. But that could wait.

Two miles west of Lago Espantosa, they reached Fremont's Rafter Q headquarters. The ranch was typical of beef outfits in the Nueces country—an adobe-walled ranchhouse, its whitewash gleaming in the sun, pole corrals, a haystack or two, *aguista*-roofed barns and outbuildings, a rusty windmill turning its vanes lazily

over a derrick surrounded by brimming tanks.

They off-saddled at the cavvy corral and Hatfield turned Goldy loose for a well-deserved rest. A few minutes later they were relaxing in the cool parlor of the Rafter Q ranchhouse. Above the fireplace mantle was a framed portrait of young Fremont's father, the doughty old Texan who had founded the Rafter Q and who had been bushwacked by Buck Jarbo, the rancher who owned the range west of the Fremont place.

"Yuh can take yore bedroll over to the bunkhouse, if yuh like, Slim-Jim," Fremont said. "Yuh'll hear the *cocinero* ring the triangle for supper."

The Ranger, sensing that the young rancher wanted to be alone with Donna, headed for the door.

"'*Sta bueno*, boss. As long as I'm workin' for yuh, what's the first job on the book?"

Quent Fremont grinned moodily. "Yuh saw that jag of yearlin's I got corraled over on the Nueces," he said. "First thing in the mornin', yuh can take a *pasear* over there and slap my iron on those critters. One of my Mexican *vaqueros* will go with yuh. It might be a good idea if yuh didn't mention tanglin' with the Ghost in Golden Armor over at the bunkshack. The Ghost scares my ignorant peons."

Hatfield was in a high good humor as he shouldered his bedroll and headed for the Rafter Q bunkhouse. Fremont's working orders were precisely in line with the Ranger's own desires.

Over there in the vicinity of the Nueces branding corral, he would be able to pick up the tracks of the Ghost's white Arabian saddler. Where the trail of the escaping phantom would lead, he could only guess, but unless his hunches were wrong, Hatfield believed that the Ghost in Golden Armor had headed west through the *brasada*.

If so, the trail should lead to Buck Jarbo's Flying J range. And it would be difficult for the ex-rustler to hide a *blanco* stallion as distinctive as the Arabian which the Ghost rode.

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

SECRET OF THE CENTRAL HILLS

by JACKSON COLE

CHAPTER V

Trail of the Ghost

AT SUPPER that night, Jim Hatfield made the acquaintance of Dr. Jonas Trevor and his surveyor, Charlie Cameron. In contrast to Luke Weston's surly hostility, Hatfield found the mild-mannered leader of the expedition friendly enough.

Discussing the expedition's work in the bunkhouse with young Cameron, Hatfield got the impression that Weston's cranky outlook on life was due to professional jealousy. Upon the death of the celebrated Dr. Rudolphe Gosche, Luke Weston had entertained ambitions to occupy the head of the University archaeology department, thereby being the leader of the next expedition to the Nueces country.

Instead, the board of regents had given the coveted position to a man from Germany, Dr. Jonas Trevor. But it had taken six years for the University to get around to appropriating the money for a second expedition to drain Haunted Lake in search of the Aztec treasure reputed to lie beneath its historic waters.

"Young Donna fallin' head over heels in love with Fremont rubs Prof. Weston the wrong way too, Slim-Jim," chuckled the young civil engineer. "I had ideas of courting Donna myself, when we were students at the University. But she took one look at that cowboy and I knew my chances were cooked."

Hatfield shared the bunkhouse with seven Mexican *vaqueros*, thorn-scarred veterans of the *brasada* who comprised the Rafter Q crew. Remembering Fremont's warning, Hatfield was careful not to mention the Ghost in Golden Armor. These superstitious *vaqueros* might desert the ranch en masse if they believed the spook of their long-dead Spanish ancestor was guarding Haunted Lake's secret.

Lying in his soogans that night, Hatfield summed up his first-day findings on the case which Roaring Bill McDowell had warned him might be tantamount to suicide.

He had actually seen the phantom rider

in the golden armor. He had confirmed his hunch that Buck Jarbo, out of the Castrovito penitentiary, had returned to this country.

Putting two and two together, Hatfield believed he had contrived a motive for Buck Jarbo's masquerading as the Ghost in Golden Armor. By terrorizing the Mexican cowpunchers who worked for Rafter Q, Jarbo could strip Fremont of his crew and force the young rancher into bankruptcy. It took men, skilled *brasaderos,* to handle beef in the Texas thickets. Without a crew, Fremont could not last long—and Haunted Lake would become Jarbo's.

It was significant that the Ghost in Golden Armor had not ridden the range in the vicinity of Haunted Lake since the massacre of Dr. Rudolphe Gosche and his scientific expedition, six years before. During five of those intervening years, Buck Jarbo had been out of circulation behind the grim walls of the Texas State Penitentiary.

Now that Jarbo was back in the saddle, the Ghost in Golden Armor had put in another appearance. These facts were of paramount importance in the Ranger's reasoning. . . .

Breakfasting at dawn the next morning, the individuals who made the Rafter Q their headquarters scattered on their various missions of the day. Quent Fremont hitched a team to a Conestoga freight wagon and departed for Sollazzo to pick up a load of barbed wire. He was planning to throw a fence around Haunted Lake to prevent Jarbo from hazing Flying J beef across his range.

Dr. Trevor and Luke Weston returned to their labors at Haunted Lake, taking a feverish interest in their project now that the drainage ditch was fast approaching completion. Young Charlie Cameron departed for the foothills of the Navajada range, where he was mapping the old Spanish trails as his part in the Alamo University's expedition.

Jim Hatfield threw a saddle on Goldy and set out for the Nueces. He was accompanied by one of the Rafter Q *vaqueros,* a husky young Chihuahuan named Pablo Escobedo.

Reaching the brush corral on the river bank, the Ranger got a fire going to heat Fremont's branding iron. No stranger to cattle ranges, Hatfield roped each ladino steer in turn, hogtied them expertly, and stood by while Pablo slapped the Rafter Q brand on the hides of protesting animals.

By noon the jag of beef had been branded and set free to roam the thickets. The day's work was finished, as far as Escobedo was concerned. For Jim Hatfield, it was just beginning.

LEADING Goldy over to the clearing where he had found Quent Fremont spread-eagled over the big ant-hill, Hatfield searched at the edge of the rimming *mogotes* of thorny junco bush and retama scrub. Finally he located the hoof prints of the leggy white Arab stud on which the Ghost in Golden Armor had made his getaway.

A skilled tracker, Hatfield detected certain telltale flaws in those hoof prints which distinguished them from any other. The off hind shoe was badly worn, its calks missing. The nigh front shoe revealed where a farrier had crimped a nailhead, causing an infinitesimal gouge in the dirt at every step of that hoof.

Pablo Escobedo, riding up on his shaggy buckskin gelding, watched his new gringo partner curiously.

"The job ees feenish, senor," the *brasadero* said respectfully. "Why are we not riding back to thos' *hacienda* for our siesta?"

Hatfield eyed his Mexican partner thoughtfully. Pablo was a typical unschooled peon. His opinions might prove useful.

"Ever hear of the Ghost in Golden Armor?" Hatfield asked.

The *vaquero* muttered something, and crossed himself piously.

"*Por Dios,* who een the Nueces country has not?"

Hatfield grinned, plumbing this peon's superstition.

"Do yuh believe in such hogwash, *amigo?*" he asked.

Pablo rolled his coffee-colored eyes.

"*Por seguro*—surely I believe there is a Ghost, senor."

"Have you ever actually seen this Ghost?" Hatfield pursued.

Pablo mopped his walnut-brown cheek with his serape hem.

"No-o, senor. I pray I never do. But for many hondreds of *años,* Sleem-Jeem,

thees Ghost een Golden Armor has been haunting the Spanish treasure in Lago Espantoso. My own father told me so. That ees why I do not help deeg the deetch for Senor Trevor."

Hatfield rode along the side trail which branched out through the spiny jungle. In the powdered alkali which carpeted the trail, the distinctive tracks of the white Arabian were plain to read.

"Yesterday"—Hatfield spoke over his shoulder to the Mexican following him—"I saw this Ghost of yores. He was ridin' a *blanco* stallion. Would yuh say a ghost's hoss would leave tracks?"

Beads of cold sweat suddenly stood out on Pablo's forehead. Glancing apprehensively at the shadowy *brasada* which closed in about them, he rode alongside Hatfield's stirrup.

"The *blanco* would leave no tracks, senor. *Es verdad.*"

Hatfield had made his point, appealing logically to the *vaquero's* superstitious nature.

"I thought as much, Pablo. But we are now trailin' a white hoss, on which I saw a rider in a gilded armor. Which can only mean that a flesh and blood hombre is pretending to be the Ghost in Golden Armor. Yuh agree?"

Pablo's eyes widened apprehensively as he spotted the trail of a galloping horse leading up the narrow corridor ahead of them. The trail was one of a webwork of brush-hung paths which interlaced the *brasada.* Pablo Escobedo had hunted Rafter Q steers on this same trail more than once, wily *cimarrone* longhorns.

"I agree that we should ride back to the *rancho* and take our siesta, senor," quavered Pablo. "Thees trailing a ghost, I do not like eet."

Whatever his trepidations, Escobedo remained close by the Ranger's stirrups during the miles which followed. When the trail of the Ghost in Golden Armor led them out of the brush and up a ledge which ended at the rimrock of the open mesa, Hatfield found himself faced by a mile-wide basin eroded out of the tableland flats.

Up here beyond the caprock, the Ghost's trail was no longer visible. The *blanco's* hoof prints were lost in the close-cropped grama grass and stunted sage.

Riding westward until he reached the rim of the sink, Hatfield scouted the brink of the low, broken cliffs until he spotted the place where the fleeing Ghost had followed a broken defile into the sink below.

"Thees yonder ees Cortez Basin," Pablo Escobedo explained, waving an arm over the expanse of the sink. His gesture followed the line of a barbed-wire drift fence which divided the flats into equal halves. "Thees ees where Rafter Q and Flying J grazes eets remuda of *caballos si.*"

EASING himself into a comfortable hipshot posture between swellfork pommel and cantle rim, Jim Hatfield surveyed the heat-shimmering expanse of Cortez Basin. This, then, was the dividing line between Buck Jarbo's spread and the Rafter Q.

He could see a sizable cavvy of saddle stock grazing on both sides of the drift fence, Rafter Q horses to the east of the barb wire, probably Jarbo's Flying J saddlers to the west.

Hatfield turned his attention to Jarbo's side of the basin. Unbuckling an *alforja* pouch, he drew out field-glasses and focused the powerful lenses on the Flying J half of the sink. Most of the horses grazing there were wiry duns, sorrels, bays and *grullas.* Peg-ponies all; brood mares and stallions, a smattering of colts. The binoculars picked out the Flying J brands on most of the grazing animals.

Hatfield felt his pulses racing as he saw a white Arabian stallion grazing with Jarbo's herd of broncs. At this distance he could not be sure, but from what he could remember of his brief glimpse of the Ghost's getaway mount, he believed the white Arab in the field of his glasses was the same stallion.

"Come on, *amigo!*" Hatfield grinned, pouching the binoculars and gathering up his reins. "See that *blanco* grazin' beyond Jarbo's fence? That's the one the Ghost in Golden Armor rides on his night jaunts. Come with me and I'll prove it."

Pablo Escobedo shook his head adamantly, superstitious fear kindling in his obsidian-black eyes.

"No, senor. Eet ees not safe for a Rafter Q cowboy to cross senor Jarbo's fence. You deed not know that a range war exeests between thos' two ranches,

Sleem-Jeem?"

Hatfield loosened his Colts in holsters, checked the leads in his scabbarded Winchester.

"I know Jarbo and yore boss are feudin', Pablo. *'Sta bueno.* You wait here. I've got to see that Arabian stud at close range."

Pablo yelled out a warning as Hatfield rode Goldy into the mouth of a brush-hung *barranca* which broke the solid front of Cortez Basin's eastern wall.

The Ranger disappeared under the cut-bank rims, yellow dust pluming up behind him.

Squinting against the glare of the westering sun, Hatfield emerged from the mouth of the draw and put Goldy into a gallop across the lush bluestem acres of Cortez Basin. He was making a bee-line toward the drift fence which marked the boundary between the warring ranches.

Fremont's remuda headed up as the golden stallion galloped through the grazing animals. Seeing no gate in the drift fence, Hatfield touched Goldy's neck and the trained horse responded with a burst of speed. In moments the magnificent sorrel was vaulting the top strand of the boundary fence, landing on Jarbo's grass with the lithe ease of a trained steeplechase racer.

Reining down to a jogging trot, Hatfield headed across Jarbo's range, his eye on the grazing Arabian.

Spooked fuzztails stampeded away from the mounted Ranger as he halved the distance.

The Arabian stallion lifted his head, spotted the oncomming rider, and snorted with alarm. Then the big *blanco* was galloping off toward the low line of granite cliffs which marked the south wall of Cortez Basin.

Hatfield unbuckled his coiled reata from the pommel and built his loop. Horses hurtled past him in all directions as Goldy, sensing what his rider wanted, cut the white Arab from the herd and forced the animal toward the rimming cliffs.

Reining in at an angle, Hatfield got his lass'-rope twirling. His first cast missed as the cagy Arab, used to avoiding a rope, zigzagged off the open range and sought refuge in a rocky draw.

Sensing that it was trapped, the Arab came storming out of the gulch, straight into Hatfield's expertly thrown loop. Goldy veered off at an angle to take up the slack. Instantly Jim Hatfield was out of saddle, gouging his spike heels into the gumbo as he grabbed the wire-taut rope and started after the captive stallion.

Snorting with alarm, the *blanco* pawed the dust into the air as Hatfield approached. But, being well-broken, the Arabian stallion gentled quickly enough as Hatfield ran a hand along the silken mane, calming the *blanco* with a born horseman's expert touch.

HATFIELD had no difficulty in grabbing the Arabian's nigh forefoot by the fetlock and inspecting the shoe. As he had expected one nail had been crimped over.

Checking the off hind shoe was unnecessary, but Hatfield was thorough. That shoe was badly worn, its calks smoothed down to the surface of the shoe.

Hatfield cuffed back his Stetson and grinned triumphantly. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, this white Arabian was the selfsame horse which the so-called Ghost in Golden Armor had ridden in making a getaway yesterday.

Even as he rounded the stallion's rump, Hatfield saw the Flying J brand he had hoped to find. The Ghost's phantom steed belonged to Buck Jarbo, one of the most dangerous rustlers on the whole length of the Rio Grande.

"*Blanco,* old hoss," chuckled Hatfield, reaching for Goldy's rope which his mount kept taut against the dallies around Hatfield's saddle-horn, "yuh're leavin' Flyin' J pasture for the time bein'. Without his phantom *caballo* to ride, the Ghost may—"

The metallic click of a Winchester lever shoving a cartridge into the breech reached Hatfield's sensitive ears. Hand dropping to gun-butt, the Ranger wheeled —to catch sight of a .30-30 muzzle protruding from an ocotillo motte on the rim of the draw above him. The rifle was aimed straight at his heart.

"Elevate, stranger!" rasped a guttural voice from behind the ambush. "Hoss thieves ain't welcome on Flyin' J range!"

Hatfield felt his spine congeal into an ice pole. He had heard that grating voice before.

Five years before!

CHAPTER VI

Pablo Rides

CAUGHT cold under a .30-30 drop, the Ranger raised his hands away from gun-butts. His sombrero brim was resting against his shoulders, held there by the chin strap around his neck. His face was in full view of the stocky gunman who rose to a crouch behind the ocotillo hedge.

The two men stared at each other. Hatfield felt a sickish sensation at sight of the jade-green eyes under bushy, tangled brows. The gunman had a bulbous nose, a cheek on which the puckered seam of an old knife scar ran zigzag from one ear to the point of a blue-stubbled jaw. His left ear had been cropped off by a knife.

A gashlike mouth drooped under the sandy mustache of the gunman. He was barrel-chested, gorilla-armed, his legs abnormally short, and grotesquely bowed from a lifetime in the saddle.

"Well, Hatfield!" he grated. "I've waited a long time for this. Three Texas Rangers ahead of yuh have cashed in their chips, scoutin' the Suicide Strip. I reckon you'll make the fourth!"

Hatfield's lips took on a harsh fixture. He read his own doom in the black bore of the Winchester leveled at the spot where his Texas Ranger badge should have been. To this man, he was not riding incognito.

"All right, Buck Jarbo," the Lone Wolf said. "It looks like yuh've coppered my bet."

A sense of despair deepened in Jim Hatfield as he saw Buck Jarbo jerk his head, saw three burly-visaged gunslingers emerge from a tangle of dwarf juniper immediately behind the Flying J boss.

Rustler, border-hopper, gun wizard—Buck Jarbo was all three, and more. Though he was known to have killed a dozen men in cold blood, the Texas authorities had never been able to prove those murders in court. Jarbo had blazed a red trail of outlawry through the Border country, using the Flying J ranch as headquarters for a large-scale cattle rustling ring.

Jim Hatfield had finally captured Buck Jarbo in the act of hazing wetbacks across the Rio. For that rangeland crime, the State of Texas had put Jarbo behind the bars of the San Castrovito penitentiary for five years. But now Jarbo was back in his old haunts, even as Captain Bill McDowell had warned the Ranger the man would be.

"Why don't yuh plug the jasper, boss?" demanded a smallpox-scarred buckaroo at Jarbo's elbow. "Yuh caught him tryin' to steal Big White. What more d'yuh want?"

Buck Jarbo grunted an order to his three men, who immediately drew six-guns and covered the man standing in the mouth of the draw below them. Jarbo eased down the hammer of his .30-30 and, gouging his stilt-heeled boots into the shale, skidded down the short cutbank and approached Hatfield warily.

Not daring to get within range of the Texas Ranger's fists, Jarbo reached out with the Winchester muzzle and hooked the sight under the curved butts of Hatfield's .44 six-guns, flipping each in turn out of holster.

"Kill this jasper, Rusty?" jeered the Flying J boss. "I reckon yuh don't know the prize we got in our trap here. This hombre is none other than Jim Hatfield—the Texas Ranger!"

"Rusty" and his two companions stared gape-jawed at Hatfield, a new respect in their slitted eyes. Hatfield, the most dreaded Ranger in all Texas, helpless now before their guns! There was not an owl-hooter in the Lone Star State who would not have pawned his soul to be in their shoes now.

"Yuh owe me five years, Hatfield," sneered Jarbo. "Five years bustin' rocks, bein' clubbed by guards. I should ought to keep yuh prisoner for five years, Lone Wolf, to even our score. But I can promise yuh this—yuh won't be alive come midnight."

Holding the Ranger under the menace of his .30-30, Buck Jarbo grunted an order to his men on the gulch brink behind him:

"Rusty—Joe—Highpockets! Bring the hosses down. We're takin' this Ranger over to the ranch."

Hatfield saw the three Flying J punchers exchange glances.

"Yuh mean—Senor Oso, boss?"

Jarbo laughed deep in his bull throat.

"Meanin' Senor Oso. He's plumb hon-

gry for raw meat. Ranger meat. The boys are goin' to see a real show tonight, *amigos!*"

HATFIELD fisted his hands, unable to savvy this cryptic reference to "Senor Oso". He was calculating his chances of charging Buck Jarbo, wresting the Winchester out of his grasp. But that way lay suicide. Jarbo had hated Hatfield too long, had nurtured a dream of revenge for too many years to take any chances now. The Flying J boss kept well out of reach of his prisoner.

Rusty, Joe and "Highpockets" vanished behind the junipers, emerging shortly with four saddle horses. They led their mounts down into the side gulch.

Barking orders, Jarbo saw Highpockets remove Hatfield's rope noose from the white Arabian. Leading Goldy forward, Highpockets—so named because he stood nearly seven feet without benefit of his Coffeyville boots or steeple-peaked sombrero—removed Hatfield's dallies from the saddle-horn.

Coiling the rope deftly, Highpockets came up behind Hatfield and slipped the reata over his head, drawing the loop taut around the Ranger's throat.

Against four-to-one odds, Hatfield knew resistance was useless. Jarbo apparently had some special brand of vengeance in store for him over at the Flying J, some grisly means of killing him which the Flying J crew would witness. With midnight marking the deadline for his death.

Obeying the gesturing guns of his captors, the Texas Ranger mounted Goldy. Jarbo climbed aboard his cat-hammed bay mustang and dallied Hatfield's neck rope to his saddle-horn. Rusty, the red-headed ruffian who appeared to be Jarbo's right-hand man, tied Goldy's reins to the Ranger's horn while Joe, the pock-marked waddy, took a hand of pigging strings from his chaps pocket and trussed Hatfield's wrists together behind his back.

"Strikes me funny yuh'd come onto my range and try to steal one of my hosses, Hatfield," Jarbo remarked, as his men swung astride their respective mounts. "How come? I thought yuh like this Goldy hoss of yore'n a heap."

Hatfield shrugged and kept his silence. In due time, no doubt, Jarbo would get around to boasting that he was the Ghost in Golden Armor, bent on driving Quent Fremont's superstitious Mexican range crew off Rafter Q. Jarbo's reference to the three Texas Rangers who had met their deaths inside the Suicide Strip was further proof that Jarbo was the outlaw masquerading in gold-plated Spanish armor.

The four Flying J riders escorted Jim Hatfield across the open flats of Cortez Basin, heading toward the southwestern corner of the sink. In that direction, apparently, would be found the Flying J headquarters.

Crossing the open flats where his remuda was grazing, Jarbo and his men were unaware of the fact that their departure was being witnessed from across Rafter Q's half of the Basin. But, sitting his saddle on the east rim of the sink, Pablo Escobedo muffled a groan as he saw Jim Hatfield astride his magnificent golden stallion, boxed in by Jarbo's riders.

In all the *brasada* country, there was only one person whom Pablo Escobedo feared even more than he did the mysterious Ghost in Golden Armor. That man was Buck Jarbo, outlaw boss of the neighboring Flying J spread.

It was obvious that Jim Hatfield—this good-looking cowboy whom Pablo knew only as Slim-Jim—had been captured by Jarbo while in the act of running down the white Arabian stallion.

More than one Rafter Q cowhand had lost his life at the hands of Buck Jarbo in the past. He had even killed Quent Fremont's own father. Now, it seemed that this Slim-Jim was marked for a similar fate.

Pablo Escobedo picked up his reins and turned his *caballo* in the direction of the Rafter Q, his thoughts returning to his delayed afternoon siesta. In the manner of his race, Pablo shrugged his serape-clad shoulders and squinted off across the floor of Cortez Basin to where Hatfield and his four captors were now fast-dwindling dots on the landscape.

Pablo had warned Slim-Jim not to cross that drift fence onto enemy soil. There was nothing Pablo could do to help the reckless young gringo. Only one thing was certain—the Rafter Q had lost another range hand.

Slim-Jim would never be seen alive again.

WITH that grim prediction putting its pressure on Pablo's simple mind, the *vaquero* rode at an easy trot to conserve his buckskin gelding's strength for the hot afternoon ride which lay ahead. There was no need to hurry. Slim-Jim was beyond human aid now. Even when he heard the news, his *patron*, Quent Fremont, would not be so foolhardy as to ride over to Flying J and demand his new cowboy's safe return.

The sun was touching the jagged outlines of the Navajada range when Pablo Escobedo turned his shaggy buckskin into the corral at the Rafter Q home ranch and made his way to the bunkhouse. A glance at the compound in front of the ranchhouse told him that Quent Fremont was still absent on his wagon trip to Sollazzo. That meant that there was no danger of being ordered to do the evening chores.

The gringos who were working at the job of draining Lago Espantosa had not yet returned from the lake for supper. Pablo believed that he was alone on the ranch. Now would be a good time to sample the bottle of *aguardiente* he had purchased at a saloon in Sollazzo, on his last trip to town.

Quent Fremont did not allow his men to drink.

Pablo was enjoying his second slug of the potent Mexican brandy inside the bunkhouse when he heard a spur jingle outside. He hastily shoved his bottle under the straw tick of his bunk, expecting to see the disapproving face of Quent Fremont in the doorway.

Instead, it was the comely blond American senorita, Donna Weston, who stood there.

"*Hola,* senorita!" Pablo grinned, made bold by the fiery liquor in his stomach. "You look *muy linda* today."

"Hello, Pablo," the girl said, backing away from the unpleasant odors from the bunkhouse. "You helped Senor Slim-Jim with the branding over on the Neuces this morning, didn't you?"

The *zapato* sandals which Pablo had donned in lieu of his tight-fitting cowboots made a slithering sound across the rammed earth floor of the bunkhouse as the *vaquero* stepped outside to join the girl.

"*Si,* senorita. The job ees feenished."

Donna frowned. "Where is Slim-Jim, then? Why didn't he come back with you?"

Pablo spread his palms in a hopeless gesture, savoring the drama of the sensational news he had to impart.

"Ah, the poor Senor Sleem-Jeem—I am afraid he ees *muerto* by now."

Donna reached out to seize Pablo's ragged sleeve.

"*Muerto*—dead? What on earth do you mean, Pablo?"

The Mexican cowhand grinned mysteriously.

"Sleem-Jeem, he trailed the phantom *caballo* of thos' Ghost een Golden Armor, senorita. He found thos' white horse, *tambien.* Over een Senor Jarbo's pasture een Cortez Basin."

A look of panic was born in Donna Weston's blue eyes at Pablo's words.

"Go on—what happened? Do you mean to say Slim-Jim was killed over in the Basin?"

Enjoying the suspense he had kindled in the girl, Pablo settled himself down on the bunkhouse bench.

"Sleem-Jeem, he did not find thos' Ghost, senorita. But he was capture' by Senor Buck Jarbo and hees *caballeros,* it is true. When last I saw thees *Americano,* they were taking heem over to Flying J. *Quizas* by now Sleem-Jeem ees sweenging at the end of a hangrope from one of Senor Jarbo's postoaks, *es verdad.*"

Donna Weston swayed, as if stunned by the peon's disclosure. After a moment she got a grip on herself and turned imploringly to Escobedo.

"Pablo, you and I must ride over to Flying J at once—now! Slim-Jim is one of the Rafter Q's men. If Jarbo has captured him—"

Pablo shook his head adamantly.

"No, senorita. Not for all the *oro* wheech your father weel find een Haunted Lake would I rode to Flying J. Not weeth an army would I cross Jarbo's range, senorita! That way lies death for any Rafter Q hombre, *es verdad.*"

DONNA WESTON moaned despairingly and spun on her heel, lurching across the ranch yard toward the horse corral. She was alone on the Rafter Q. Whatever could be done for Slim-Jim, she must do.

Fremont was not expected back from

Sollazzo with his wagon load of wire until late tonight. Her father and Dr. Trevor were not yet back from their work at Haunted Lake.

The Rafter Q boys were out in the *brasada,* popping the brush for cattle. Even if they were here, she knew their answer would be the same as Pablo's. No Mexican in Fremont's employ would dare invade Jarbo's hostile range.

Slim-Jim, the handsome young stranger who had saved her life and Fremont's yesterday, was undoubtedly in mortal danger, if not already a victim of Jarbo's murderous guns. It was unthinkable that no effort should be made to rescue him.

Numb with fear, Donna Weston dragged a high-horned Texas saddle from the corral rail and cinched it on the fast pinto which Quent had assigned for her personal use. Mounting, she headed the little peg-pony westward toward the sundown glow and the Navajada range.

In that direction lay Buck Jarbo's ranch headquarters. Somewhere over in that brooding, blood-red twilight, Slim-Jim was a prisoner of the outlaw who had killed her fiancé's father.

Spurred on by a panicky sense of time running out fast, Donna Weston lashed the pinto into a hard run. She was not quite sure what she would do when she reached the Flying J. She was not even sure she could locate Jarbo's spread!

CHAPTER VII

Captive on Flying J

BUCK JARBO'S Flying J outfit resembled the squalid camp of a poverty-stricken Mexican family, in contrast to the neat architecture and well-kept fence of Fremont's Rafter Q. Facing the burned-out cerise glare of the sundown which might be his last on earth, Jim Hatfield sized up Jarbo's ranch for what it was—an owlhoot hideout, conveniently close to the Mexican border, too isolated to come under the control of Texas law.

Furtive eyes watched the incoming riders from the shadowy gallery of an adobe bunkhouse—gringos on the dodge, Mexicans with the stamp of Cain on them. Jarbo's place was less of a cattle ranch than it was a rendezvous for the offscourings of Border outlawry.

Excitement traveled rapidly through the Flying J grounds as Jarbo drew a Colt .45 and covered the Texas Ranger while he dismounted at the cavvy corral gate. Men began trooping out of the dusk, drawn by the sensational news that the famous Texas Ranger had been captured.

Peering around at the hostile, gloating faces which ringed him in, Hatfield had the impression that he had seen some of Jarbo's riffraff crew before. Many of these owlhooters packed reward bounties on their scalps, he was positive. Photographs of some of them were tacked to the walls of Ranger offices and barracks throughout the Lone Star State.

When their horses had been unsaddled and turned into the stone-walled corral, Buck Jarbo stepped over to where Highpockets was riding herd on their prisoner with a Winchester.

"The only fair thing to do, Senor *Rangero,*" leered the Flying J boss, "is to put yuh out of yore suspense. We have a friend we're honin' for yuh to meet. We call him Senor Oso. If yuh're up on yore Mex lingo mebbe yuh got an idea what kind of finish yuh got ahead of yuh."

Jim Hatfield's face was blank. "Oso", he knew, was the Spanish word for bear. He had flushed more than one shaggy black bruin out of the *brasada* in years past. This Senor Oso of whom Buck Jarbo spoke was probably a hairy-chested Mexican killer who resembled a bear, a sadist who killed for the sheer joy of killing. If so, then Jarbo had probably decided to give Senor Oso the pleasure of cashing in Hatfield's chips.

Clamping his lips doggedly, Hatfield followed Buck Jarbo past a sway-roofed granary, Highpockets' .30-30 muzzle prodding his spine. The other denizens of the Flying J trooped along behind them, jinglebobbed spurs setting up a cacophony of sound.

The odors of chili and garlic and coffee and barbequed beef were wafted to Hatfield's nostrils as they passed a cookshack. The *cocina* was connected to Jarbo's main ranchhouse by a tule-roofed dog-walk.

Passing the ranchhouse, Jarbo led the way through the purpling twilight in the direction of the adobe barns. As they ap-

proached the outbuildings, Hatfield's ears caught a snarling, animal sound issuing out of the dusk. It was toward the source of this sound that Jarbo appeared to be heading.

Then, rounding a mesquite-pole hay crib, Hatfield caught sight of a circular pole fence which walled off some sort of pit—perhaps a cistern for catching the infrequent rainfall. From the depths of this excavation the Lone Wolf heard the animal snarlings increase in intensity.

A tremor of anxiety went through the Ranger as Buck Jarbo opened a gate and stood aside, while Highpockets ushered his prisoner inside the fence. Hatfield's hands were still tied behind his back with raw-hide thongs and his holsters were empty. A feeling of impotence, of utter helplessness washed through his being as he halted on the brink of the cisternlike pit.

The pit had been dug out of bedrock, and was about ten feet deep. Staring down into the shadowy bowl, Hatfield at first thought it was empty. Then he made out a black, sinister shape pacing the floor of the pothole.

I was a shaggy, loung-snouted black bear, of a predatory type which made its den in the Nueces jungles, preying on new-dropped calves, an animal so destructive to cattle herds that Texas had posted a bounty on such bear pelts.

"This is Senor Oso, Hatfield!" Jarbo explained gloatingly. "One of my waddies roped this bear when it was a weaner cub, out in the brush. We've made a sort of a pet out of Senor Oso."

A CHILL rippled along the back of Hatfield's neck as he saw Senor Oso rear up, man-fashion, on his hind legs. The beast was full-grown now, and obviously half-starved, its flanks caved in, its brisket ribby under the unkempt black fur.

"This is Senor Oso's supper time," Jarbo went on. "Ordinarily we feed this critter stale beef, left-overs from the cookhouse. But tonight, I reckon, Oso is goin' to sample human flesh. Yore meat, Jim Hatfield!"

Horror and a mounting rage made a convulsive admixture through the Ranger as he heard the Flying J crew laugh harshly. They were men no less savage than this ravening beast which was kept prisoner in Jarbo's abandoned cistern.

"Yuh wouldn't be that inhuman, Jarbo!" Hatfield grated. "Put a bullet in my back, yes—I could savvy that. But what would be the object of tossin' my carcass to this bear?"

Buck Jarbo's cheek scar stood out lividly in the dying sundown glow as he held up a hand in front of the Ranger. His thick spatulate fingers spread out as he ticked off one by one:

"One, two, three, four, five—five years behind the bars at the Castrovito penitentiary, Hatfield!" snarled the outlaw. "You sent me to that hole of a jail, Lone Wolf. Every day and night of those five years you were ridin' high, wide and handsome, addin' to yore rep as a Texas Ranger. Me —I was rottin' away in a cellblock, livin' for the day when I'd be loose again. Just existin', on the dream that some day I'd be able to settle my score with yuh, Hatfield."

The Ranger listened in silence. He had never heard more venom in a human voice, more supercharged hatred issuing from a man's heart. Buck Jarbo was a berserk lunatic, his reason unhinged as a result of his festering desire for vengeance against the star-toter who had captured him on the Rio Grande half a decade ago.

"All right, Buck!" Hatfield ripped out. "Shoot me and get it over with. Yuh talk big when you've got yore gang behind yuh. Yuh cut a wide splash in the *brasada* —when yuh can shoot from ambush. I reckon I'll prove I can stand up and ea yore lead without beggin' for mercy."

Jarbo made no move to unholster a gun. He shook his head slowly, savering his triumph.

"Hatfield," he said slowly, "yuh'll die by no bullet. That's too quick and easy. It won't be yore *dead* carcass that Senor Oso will sink his fangs and claws into. Savvy what I'm drivin' at?"

In spite of himself, the Texas Ranger felt the color recede in his taut facial muscles.

"Yuh—yuh don't intend to—"

Jarbo laughed harshly, irrationally. "I'm tossin' yuh alive into that pit, Ranger!" snarled the Flying J boss. "Yuh've seen bear and bulls fight it out down in Mexico? Well, the boys are goin' to see how long a salty hombre named Jim Hatfield can last ag'in a live bear that's starved for fresh meat, savvy?"

Hatfield understood, now, why the Flying J crew had begun to station themselves around the top rail of the fence, like Roman spectators of old, come to see gladiators fight to the death. As Christian martyrs of another era had been hurled into dens of ravenous lions, Jarbo was about to reenact that diabolical rite here in this remote corner of Texas.

They were watching him closely, now. A full moon had risen above the *brasada* country during the last few minutes, and its spectral witch-glow bathed the Texas Ranger's taut face with an unearthly brilliance.

But Jarbo and his henchmen detected no sign of cringing, no faltering in the Ranger's inborn courage. They were staring at Hatfield with a grudging admiration for a brand of valor which far transcended anything they had ever seen before.

Cornered, his holsters empty, his wrists pinioned, Hatfield was facing the most grueling ordeal possible for Jarbo to mete out, and he was facing it with his head high, his eyes resolute.

"Give the hombre a chance, Jarbo!" spoke up a red-whiskered owlhooter from the rail fence. "Even if he is a Johnny Law, give him a fightin' chance ag'in that b'ar. Yuh can at least loosen his hands."

JARBO shrugged. Stooping, he took a long-bladed skinning knife from its sheath under his left boot leg. The razor-honed steel blade glinted in the argentine moonlight as the Flying J boss sidled around behind Hatfield.

The Ranger braced himself. If he could lunge a shoulder against Jarbo, it was possible that he might hurl the fiendish gun-boss of the Flying J into senor Oso's bear pit. The half-starved beast would make short work of a human being down there.

But Jarbo, reading Hatfield's intent, backed off. He nodded to Highpockets, who stepped forward and fisted Hatfield's shirt into a tight bunch with both hands. Hauling backwards, Highpockets pulled the Ranger forward, off balance.

Hatfield was aware of Jarbo stepping in quickly behind him. His whiskey-fouled breath was fetid against the Ranger's neck. Jarbo's knife slashed quickly at the pigging strings which bound his wrists, and Hatfield felt his arms come free.

Ignoring Highpockets' rifle, Hatfield spun around, clubbing his fists. He knew that Jarbo had not released his bonds for any humane motive. He had done so to add to the macabre sporting value of the forthcoming struggle between man and wild beast.

Jarbo was sidling toward the fence, between Hatfield and the edge of the cistern in which the black bear was making the night hideous with its growling. But even as Hatfield charged the Flying J boss, Highpockets stretched out a long leg and caught one of the Ranger's spur rowels, tripping him.

Hatfield sprawled, his jaw hitting the loose gravel at the edge of the bear pit. Ten feet below, Senor Oso was back on all fours, pacing the floor of the pit, fangs slavering.

The Ranger came up on all fours, aware that Jarbo and Highpockets were coming up behind him. His body rocked under the impact of a kick which caught him between his shoulder blades, with all of Jarbo's weight behind it.

Before he could recover from the paralyzing jolt on his spine, Highpockets reached down to seize Hatfield by either ankle and, with a prodigious effort, upended the Ranger. Hatfield caught a blurred impression of the battery of fiendish faces circling the bear pit fence as he cartwheeled up and over the rim of the cistern.

He somersaulted in mid-air and miraculously landed on his feet, his knees springing to absorb the impact of the fall. In an apelike crouch, both hands pressed flat on the loose hay which carpeted the floor of the pit, Jim Hatfield found himself staring across the pothole toward Senor Oso.

The bear, startled by the human form hurtling down into its rock-walled prison, had retreated instinctively to the opposite wall and reared up on its hind legs. Chops peeled back to expose dripping, lethal fangs, the bear regarded his human prey through eyes which reminded Hatfield of burning embers. He had a fleeting impression of the long curved claws protruding from the padded feet, each claw as deadly as a sickle blade.

The bear outweighed him. The animal

was ravenously hungry. Even out in the *brasada,* bears had been known to attack Indians. In this confined area, no man could expect to live more than a few minutes without knife or club or gun to defend himself.

A matter of seconds, and Senor Oso could rend the trapped Ranger into hash-meat with tearing fangs and ripping claws. Jim Hatfield knew he faced the most desperate and hopeless deathtrap he had ever—seen in all the years of his peril-frought career as a Ranger—a trap from which there could be no escape.

With that grim thought riding his brain, the Ranger reared up to meet the bear's first snarling lunge.

CHAPTER VIII

Bear versus Man!

FOR Donna Weston, the trek to the Flying J Ranch was a race against moonrise. She had been repeatedly warned never to venture across Buck Jarbo's boundary line, even in broad daylight, but tonight a despairing sense of urgency forced her to drive the pinto at top speed along the *brasada* rim.

The moon was as bright as a silver dollar behind the girl's right shoulder when the winded pinto brought her to the outskirts of Jarbo's ranch. She had reached this spot by blind reckoning, knowing only in a general way that the headquarters of Jarbo's domain was slightly north of due west from Fremont's spread.

Reining down to a walk, Donna Weston swung wide to the south to avoid the fanwise pattern of yellow lamplight streaming through the windows of Jarbo's cookshack. At this hour, the Flying J crew should be at supper. Instead, she glimpsed the empty tables of the messhall as she rode past.

Then to her ears came the strident voices of shouting men, reminding her of the way crowds shouted at athletic meets back at Alamo University. For some reason, Jarbo's entire crew was congregated somewhere beyond the main ranchhouse.

She dismounted and tied the pinto to a postoak. Then, belatedly remembering that she had left the Rafter Q without bringing along any kind of firearm, she circled the Jarbo ranchhouse and caught sight of the Flying J crew massed in a tight circle around a fenced-in enclosure.

"Slim-Jim must be the reason they're shouting so! They must be torturing him!"

Donna Weston whispered the words as she crept closer to the howling, roaring circle of men. Something inside that circle was whipping these men to an inhuman frenzy of excitement. Donna Weston knew she had to find out the cause of that pandemonium. If Slim-Jim were at the core of it—

A few yards from the fenced-in area was an open-sided crib, roofed over with maguey fibers, its interior bursting with wild hay. A ladder leaned against the near end of the hay crib, offering access to the roof. From the ridgepole, Donna believed she could see over the heads of Jarbo's wildly shouting crew.

So absorbed were the Flying J riders in whatever spectacle they were witnessing inside the fence that no head was turned and no eye watched the slim girl in sombrero and levis as Professor Weston's daughter climbed the ladder and pulled herself up on the peak of the hay crib roof. What she saw brought a low scream of terror from her throat.

Here was incarnate savagery too ghastly to comprehend. Vivid in the moonlight, down in the bottom of a shallow well-like hole, she saw the crouched figure of the man she knew as Slim-Jim. Circling the bayed Rafter Q cowboy was a full-grown black bear.

Jarbo's outlaws were watching a battle such as Texas, for all its wild history, had never staged before. Bear versus man! There could be only one possible outcome of such a mismatched struggle!

Limp with horror, Donna Weston flattened her body on the sloping roof of the corn crib, unable to tear her eyes away from the inhuman spectacle being enacted before her hypnotized gaze. Without a gun, there was no way for her to destroy the wild animal, to rescue Slim-Jim from grisly doom. She could only watch—and pray that Slim-Jim's end would be mercifully swift.

Down in the pit of doom, Jim Hatfield kept turning, turning to face the circling bear. He had no illusions as to the outcome

of this inhuman duel of strength. One swipe of Senor Oso's knife-sharp claws could rake open his body from throat to crotch. Once the bear's deadly fang-studded jaws locked over a wrist or ankle, he was doomed.

But the primal instinct of self-preservation burned through every nerve and sinew of the Ranger's being now. It seemed an eternity, but in reality he had been down in this death pit less than a minute by the clock.

THE bear's first charge had resulted in a momentary triumph for Jim Hatfield. He had met Senor Oso with a double handful of dirt and rubble, scooped off the floor of the cistern. Blinded and choked by this unexpected resistance by its relatively puny foe, the bear had crashed its skull into the cistern wall at the spot where Hatfield had been crouched.

Now they were sparring for an opening, as it were. From what he knew of the nature of the species, Hatfield believed that Senor Oso might attempt wrestling tactics, try to crush his torso in a bear hug while disembowling him with his hind claws.

As the moon lifted, throwing a greater area of the circular area under its light, Jim Hatfield caught sight of a cow's thigh bone amid the débris of the bear's past meals. Even as Senor Oso charged him, howling beastially, the Ranger danced out of the bear's path and snatched up the bone. With all his strength behind the blow, Hatfield drove the heavy thigh bone at Senor Oso's skull.

The club would have killed a man. But if the bear felt the impact, it gave no sign, bouncing off the far wall and whirling like a boxer leaving the ropes.

Overhead, Jarbo and his hellions were making an uproar which dimmed the bear's snarlings, drowned out the hissing sound of Hatfield's exhausted breathing. The spectators of this grisly duel were already astounded that Hatfield had managed to avoid the bear's rushes for even as long as this single minute. They had expected to see the Ranger torn to bits within seconds after being hurled into the pit. Apparently the Lone Wolf was going to give them a real show.

Hatfield leaped back, the bone club poised as Senor Oso waddled forward man-fashion on his hind legs.

"This is finish," came to the Ranger as he felt the rock wall of the cistern strike his back, halting any retreat.

Coming forward, ducked low, Hatfield drove the knobby end of the thigh bone into the bear's slavering jaws. Senor Oso, half strangled, clawed at the bone to dislodge it, giving Hatfield his opportunity to escape to the far side of the arena.

His feet ankle-deep in reasty straw in which the animal bedded down, Hatfield got an idea. With frantic haste the Ranger plumbed his levis pockets, brought out a handful of matches. Thrusting all but one match into his shirt pocket, he squatted and scraped together all the dry straw his left hand could hold.

His fingers were rock-steady as he ignited the match against his belt buckle, touched the tiny flame to the bundle of straw in his left hand.

Senor Oso, recoiling before the sudden burst of red flame, gave vent to a snarling bark of primeval terror. Wild animals had a healthy fear of fire, the one element they could not combat. Jim Hatfield, in this moment of desperate extremity, had gambled on that fear of fire.

For the moment at least, the blazing hay in Hatfield's fist gave him respite from the wild animal across the pit. But it was a pitiful effort to postpone the inevitable. Even now, the blazing straw was burning Hatfield's hand.

He dropped his makeshift torch into the loose straw under foot, the guttering flare of the blaze accentuating the deep ruts of strain which were eroding his face. Smoke vollied up to obscure the leering, sadistic faces of Buck Jarbo and the other men rimming the fence overhead.

The bear was temporarily cowed by the circle of shuttering crimson flames which walled off the Ranger. But Hatfield knew that the beast's next attack would be the last. It would lose its fear of smoke and flame when the scanty fuel was exhausted.

But Hatfield's striking of that match had accomplished something tangible in his favor, in a totally unknown quarter.

Up on Jarbo's hay crib roof, Donna Weston was mentally applauding Slim-Jim's counter-offensive measure, when an idea came to her. She carried matches in

the pocket of her riding trousers. If she could use fire to distract the attention of Jarbo's bloodthirsty crew from the bear pit spectacle—

SLIDING down the hay crib's maguey-shingled roof, Donna skidded over the eaves and landed on a pile of hay ten feet below. Clawing a match from her pocket, she snapped it into flame with a thumb nail and then, poking a hole in the haypile, ignited the tinder-dry hay.

Within seconds the fire had leaped up to envelop the rear of the open-walled shed. A great sheet of flame shed its satanic red glow over the surrounding landscape, as the girl leaped to the shelter of the west wall of the hay crib.

The unexpected crackle of flames and a roll of billowing smoke from the roof of the hay crib at their backs caused instant pandemonium among the Flying J cowboys who were lining the bear pit fence. Fire in the *brasada* country could be a devastating thing, if it got out of control.

There was a medium-strong wind blowing across the Texas flats tonight, and already sparks were plunging skyward, to be borne out in the direction of the Flying J house and barns and other highly inflammable outbuildings. Jim Hatfield and Senor Oso's duel was wiped out of Jarbo's mind, as he saw his hay crib being gutted by flames of unknown origin. The entire ranch might go up in flames, if this fire spread!

"Get goin', all of yuh!" bellowed the Flying J boss, racing away from the bear pit. "Bring buckets—barrels. We can't save that hay but we got to wet down these other buildin's before the whole thing goes up!"

Donna Weston, her heart pounding her ribs, moved away from the furnacelike heat of the doomed hay crib as she saw Jarbo's men sprinting toward horse troughs and windmill tanks, leaving the bear-pit fence empty.

Running out into the open firelight, Donna vaulted the low rail fence and flung herself on hands and knees over the rim of the bear pit.

"Slim-Jim! Oh, Slim-Jim!"

Jim Hatfield, kneeling behind his flimsy barrier of blazing straw, was unbuckling his sharp-roweled spurs to use as weapons when he closed in final combat with Senor Oso.

Hardly able to believe his ears, the Lone Wolf glanced up to see Donna etched against a blood-red background of dancing firelight. The fence rails were empty of Jarbo's men, by some miracle Hatfield could not explain.

Hatfield came to his feet, watching Senor Oso out of the corner of his eye. The bear, still bayed by the blazing straw which was eating across the floor of the pit toward him, was slavering like a rabid dog, red-shot eyes watching his human quarry as if waiting for the blaze to die out.

"A fence rail, Donna!" Hatfield yelled, as he saw her come to her feet. "I can climb out of here then!"

Donna whirled around. She was dimly aware of men racing toward the hay crib with buckets of water and wet gunnysacks. The Jarbo crew, absorbed with its job of fire-fighting, had not yet spotted her presence in their midst.

Fear added impetus to the effort she put into tearing a cottonwood rail off the bear pit fence. In a moment she was slanting the rail pole down into the cistern. Without it, Hatfield would have been helpless to have scaled the overhanging rock walls of the pit.

Senor Oso's howl of animal fury dinned the girl's ears as she saw Hatfield shinny up the slanting pole. She saw the bear make a last frantic lunge, ripping a heel off Hatfield's kicking boot as the Ranger scrambled to safety on the rim of the pit.

Behind him, Jarbo's bear was trying to scramble up the pole to freedom, but the fence rail split under Senor Oso's weight. That danger was behind Hatfield now. But there was still Buck Jarbo's cordon of fast-shooting outlaws to run, and the Ranger and Donna both afoot and without weapons!

CHAPTER IX

The Ghost Rides

REACTION seized Donna Weston, and for a moment Hatfield thought he had a fainting female on his hands, as he

leaped to grab the tottering girl in his arms. But Donna was made of sterner stuff. She shook him off and together they scaled the fence. Hatfield led her in the direction of the corral where Jarbo kept his horses.

Somewhere behind the roar of the flames which had collapsed the roof of the hay crib, a gunshot blasted the night. A bullet tracked its sightless path between Hatfield's temple and the girl's head, followed by a raucous bellow of shouts from the men who were dumping buckets of water on the nearest outbuilding.

"They've spotted us, Donna!" the Ranger shouted, gripping her hand. "If we can make it to the horse corral—"

In spite of the fact that he had lost one of his boot heels in the bear pit, Jim Hatfield was covering ground at a clip that would have been the envy of a college athlete.

"I was—women's sprint champion—at Alamo U!" Donna Weston shouted. "Lead the way, Slim-Jim!"

Bullets were shrieking past them from several angles now. Hatfield broke his stride as a slug scraped his thigh, and he plunged headlong in a roil of dust.

He was on his feet before Donna could stop her headlong flight. Behind them, Buck Jarbo and his Flying J crew were racing in pursuit, their firefighting forgotten.

They put the ranchhouse between them and the oncoming gunhawks, sprinting down the covered dog-walk toward the cookshack. The burning hay crib added to the brilliance of the full moon, turning night into day.

From the corner of the Flying J mess hall, Highpockets was pumping the lever of his Winchester, driving steel-jacketed slugs at the escaping couple. Hatfield had reached the gate of the cavvy corral and was sliding back the hickory bar.

"No time to saddle up!" panted the Ranger. "Wait here!"

Jarbo's men were close, dangerously close. They were holding their fire now, not wanting to wound any of their saddle stock with stray slugs.

Hatfield shot a frantic glance at the row of saddles on the top of the stone fence. If he could locate his own, there was a .44-40 carbine in the boot. But there was no time for that. He had Donna's safety as well as his own to think about. Escaping from the Flying J range was his primary purpose tonight.

A whistle brought Goldy trotting over from the group of Flying J cavvy ponies in the far end of the corral.

Hatfield saw Jarbo's bulky shape vault the stone fence twenty yards away. The Flying J boss was doing that to cut him off from getting a horse for Donna's use.

Jarbo's six-gun spat flame as he laid a shot in close, aiming to cripple or kill the Ranger's golden sorrel. Then Hatfield had gained the corral gate where Donna was waiting.

He boosted the girl astride Goldy, vaulted over the sorrel's rump and raked his mount with unaccustomed steel. He was thankful now that he hadn't had time to remove his spurs in Senor Oso's death-pit.

The magnificent sorrel exploded into a run from a standing start, bringing oaths of dismay from the Flying J punchers who were racing toward the corral. Sporadic gunfire followed them, bullets whining overhead as Goldy lined out toward the rimming *brasada*.

Hatfield could hear Jarbo bawling orders, dividing his crew into two sections. Half of the outfit would remain at the ranch to fight the fire. The other half would saddle up to give chase to the escaping Ranger and a girl who, somehow, had been instrumental in rescuing Hatfield from the bear pit.

"We're safe now, Donna," Hatfield panted, with the girl's blond tresses whipping back against his face. "The hoss wasn't foaled who could outrun Goldy. If we only had a gun between us!"

Reaching the solid wall of the *brasada*, Goldy hesitated. The thorny jungle was crisscrossed with trails, trails which Jarbo's crew knew from memory. To a stranger, the *brasada* presented a seemingly unbroken barrier of mesquites and Spanish dagger and tawny *chaparo prieto* scrub.

HATFIELD slapped Goldy's neck and the sorrel headed along the fringe of the brush. This way would take them along the mesa in the direction of Cortez Basin.

Already, the night breeze brought to

the ears of the bayed fugitives the drum-roll of hoofbeats as Buck Jarbo and a dozen of his heavily-armed riders hammered in pursuit. The ghostly shapes of four riders were cutting across the open mesa toward the sink where Hatfield had been captured that afternoon. The Ranger realized that Jarbo had detailed riders to cut them off.

The mouth of a trail opened up between heavy *mogotes* of mesquite chaparral and coma trees. Goldy plunged into the opening without hesitation, and the enfolding *brasada* closed in about them, obliterating the moonlight.

Here in the brush, a man could not see his hand before his face. But Goldy, slowing to a gallop, threaded through the unseen path which *cimarrone* steers had blazed through the thickets, covering two miles before Hatfield halted the winded sorrel for a rest.

Sliding off the horse's back, the man and the girl stood listening in the night for sounds of pursuit. They could hear the remote sound of shouts, coming from the firefighters back at the Flying J. The dull red glow against the sky was diminishing now. Jarbo's punchers had the fire under control.

"This—this sounds a mite foolish, mebbe," Hatfield panted, "but I got to thank yuh, Donna, for gettin' me out of the tightest scrape of my life. That took plenty courage."

She reached up impulsively and pulled his head down, crushing her lips against his. Hatfield knew an electric thrill as she released him, was reminded of the fact that for him, a woman's love was a luxury he could not afford.

Yet he knew that this girl was betrothed to another man, knew that this kiss was basically impersonal and platonic, a tribute from a woman to a man whose courage was a thing nothing but a kiss could truly express. There had been no hint of disloyalty to Quentin Fremont in the girl's emotional outburst.

"Slim-Jim," she said, "that bear fight will haunt my dreams for years to come. What kind of beast is this Buck Jarbo?"

It was on the tip of Hatfield's tongue to reveal the fact that he was a Texas Ranger, that Jarbo had tried to even old scores between them tonight. Instead, he kept this secret. Not until the Ghost of Golden Armor had been finally brought to bay could he reveal his true mission in the Nueces country.

"Let's forget Jarbo for the time bein', Donna," he said gently. "And thanks—for what yuh just did. Quent Fremont is a lucky man, gettin' you."

A shaft of moonlight filtering down through the bower of yellow-flowering *agarita* brush over them touched Hatfield's face. Donna thought she saw a brooding sense of loss limned in his penetrating green eyes.

"Slim-Jim, isn't there a woman in your life, somewhere? Waiting for you at the end of this—this drifter's trail you're riding?"

Hatfield grinned bleakly. He could not tell her that a Texas Ranger, exposed to constant danger which made each new day a separate tenure of life, could not think of love.

"No woman, Donna. I reckon I was cut out to be a lone wolf."

She clutched his arm then, as a rataplan of hoofbeats passed them by way of a concealed trail some distance away. A Jarbo rider—perhaps Jarbo himself—was questing the *brasada* in search of the vanished pair.

"Donna," Hatfield whispered, "when we get back to the Rafter Q, suppose yuh don't say anything to Fremont about my scrape with Buck Jarbo. I have reasons of my own for askin' that."

Donna shrugged in the darkness. "Pablo Escobedo knew that Jarbo had captured you, over in the Basin today. That Mexican is liable to talk."

Hatfield lifted her back on the sorrel. Then they were giving Goldy his head, pushing through the dense thicket trail.

"I think I located the Ghost's white stallion over in Cortez Basin today, Donna," he told her. "Jarbo owns a *blanco* Arabian. I have a hunch Jarbo is the spook who parades around in golden armor."

DONNA twisted around to stare at him, her golden hair making a dull sheen in the mottled moonlight.

"But why? Why should Jarbo do such a fantastic thing? What does he hope to accomplish by that masquerade?"

Hatfield shrugged. "He's out to ruin the Rafter Q," he reminded her. "If he

can terrorize Quent's ignorant Mexican *vaqueros,* Quent can't stay in business. Yuh forget that Jarbo wants to water his Flyin' J beef at Haunted Lake. It's the only shore source of water in the Suicide Strip."

The moon was two hours higher in the Texas sky when they emerged from the *brasada* jungle, to find themselves on the open mesa south of Cortez Basin. Ahead of them was Rafter Q range and safety. In the remote distance they could see the lights winking in Fremont's ranchhouse.

It was Donna who spotted the blur of movement, out across the open mesa. Her sudden stiffening inside the curve of his arm caused the Ranger to glance past her.

A rider was spurring a snow-white horse across the flats, a quarter of a mile away. The moonlight caught winking highlights on the rider's metallic costume, revealed the bannering crimson plume atop the rider's gilded helmet.

"The Ghost!" Donna Weston cried. "This is the second time I've actually seen the Ghost in Golden Armor!"

Hatfield halted Goldy with a word, his eyes following the *brasada* phantom as the white Arabian saddler sped southwestward in the direction of the Navajada range.

"Jarbo could have ridden over to the Basin tonight," Hatfield muttered. A sense of futility flooded through him as he realized that, without rifle or six-guns, there was little use in following the spectral horseman. "Jarbo could have had his golden armor suit cached somewhere over there, could have saddled up his white Arabian and hit the trail tonight."

They watched in silence as the Ghost in Golden Armor vanished over a hogback ridge in the distance. It was a bitter moment for Hatfield, knowing he dared not risk setting Donna Weston afoot here on Jarbo's range so far from Fremont's ranch and safety. Her presence prevented the Ranger from trailing the *brasada* phantom.

"I'm scared, Slim-Jim!" she whispered. "I'm worried about Doctor Trevor's surveyor, Charlie Cameron. Charlie's camped over in those foothills, surveying the Spanish Trail toward the Rio Grande. And that's where the Ghost seems to be heading."

A frown carved a notch between Hatfield's brows. He put Goldy into a lope, heading for the remote lights of the Rafter Q.

"The Ghost massacred Dr. Rudolphe Gosche and his party over in those same mountains," Donna reminded Hatfield. "If anything should happen to Charlie Cameron, I couldn't stand it. He—he was in love with me before I met Quent, you know."

They arrived at Fremont's ranchhouse an hour later. No one was home except the Mexican cook, who was keeping a hot meal in readiness for the return of Quent Fremont from Sollazzo.

"Your father is spending the night over at Haunted Lake with El Doctor Trevor," the *cocinero* answered the girl's anxious query, speaking in Spanish. "Their work will soon be finished, *si.*"

Donna and Hatfield, eagerly accepting the cook's invitation to eat a belated supper, exchanged relieved glances. It would not have been easy for them to have explained to Prof. Luke Weston why Donna had come riding in at midnight with Slim-Jim, the saddle bum with whom Weston had forbidden his daughter to associate.

The meal finished, Hatfield bade Donna good night and headed for the bunkhouse. The fact that Prof. Weston had not come home tonight, as was his invariable custom, put a nagging doubt in the back of the Ranger's head.

"It seems incredible," Hatfield mused, "but what if—"

His train of thought was interrupted by the arrival of Quent Fremont, driving in from Sollazzo with his wagonload of wire. Helping the boss stable his team, Hatfield put a question to the young Rafter Q owner:

"I notice yore prospective father-in-law, Professor Weston, walks with a kind of limp, Quent. Any idea why?"

Fremont, his face still swollen and mottled from his ordeal on the ant-hill, saw nothing but a casual curiosity back of his new cowboy's question.

"Donna says he fell and hurt his left knee-cap the other day, Slim-Jim," Fremont said. "He never limped before."

The Ranger mulled this over in his mind as he headed for the bunkhouse and a much needed rest after the day's strenuous events.

Luke Weston walked with a limp which he claimed was a result of a minor mishap over on the job at Lago Espantosa. But Hatfield recalled that the shot he had fired at the Ghost in Golden Armor had ricocheted off the phantom's armor-clad left thigh. The impact of a .44 slug grazing the Ghost's armor could very well bruise the leg underneath, enough to make a man limp.

CHAPTER X

A Dying Man Speaks

JIM HATFIELD reported for work the next morning with his holsters filled with a duplicate pair of cedar-butted Colt .44 Peacemakers, which he carried in the warsack he had put in the bunkhouse. They replaced the guns which Buck Jarbo had appropriated over in Cortez Basin.

Fremont's work for the day was to begin building a barbed-wire fence to block off Haunted Lake. He put Hatfield in charge of Pablo Escobedo and a group of Mexican *vaqueros*, who grumbled peevishly at having to do such menial labor.

At breakfast that morning, Pablo had said nothing concerning Hatfield's return from the Flying J. The Ranger had bribed the startled peon to secrecy with a few *pesos*.

With his fence-stringing crew following him with a wagon loaded with posts and spools of new barbed wire which Fremont had purchased in Sollazzo, Hatfield put Goldy into a gallop, eager to reach Haunted Lake in time for a little investigating before going to work. This morning, Goldy carried a centerfire kak to replace the saddle Hatfield had left on the Flying J corral fence.

Reaching Dr. Trevor's field headquarters at Haunted Lake, the Lone Wolf Ranger found the scientist's Mexican labor gangs busy putting the finishing touches to the drainage ditch. That completed, it would be revealed whether or not the body of water hid the secret of long-lost Spanish loot.

The ditch was within ten feet of the rim of the lake now. That barrier of dirt would be blasted free to send the brackish waters of Espantosa surging downgrade toward the mesa rim. Eventually it would trickle into the Nueces River ten miles away.

Standing on the earthen dam which held the Lake's placid waters in check, Donna Weston's father was superintending the scraper and shovel gangs in their last day's labor. Even from a distance, Hatfield saw that Professor Weston's face seemed unusually gaunt. If Weston had spent a night in the saddle instead of sleeping in Trevor's army tent, he would be tired out.

"You, Mr. Slim-Jim! I want to see you!"

The voice, hailing the Lone Wolf from the interior of the canvas tent which Goldy was passing, brought Hatfield twisting in saddle.

Dr. Trevor stood at the open fly of the tent, a long Bavarian meerschaum pipe resting against his ginger whiskers, his white pith helmet shoved back from his bald head. The eminent German archaeologist spoke English without a trace of Teutonic accent.

"Shore enough," Hatfield drawled, reining up and stepping down from stirrups. "What can I do for yuh, Doctor?"

Trevor waved Hatfield toward a folding camp stool. The scientist seated himself on a box behind his field desk, on which were spread various maps of the region which the young surveyor, Charlie Cameron, had prepared.

"You say your name is Slim-Jim, young man," Jonas Trevor said, smoke purling from his thin nostrils. His bottle-green eyes surveyed the young Ranger steadily from behind his owlish spectacles.

Hatfield's fingers were busy shaping up a brown-paper cigarette as he nodded.

"What's Trevor leading up to now?" he wondered.

"You doubtless have reasons of your own for riding the Nueces country under a pseudonym," the Prussian scientist said, stoking the meerschaum with fine-cut Havana leaf. "I have reason to believe you are James Hatfield, the most celebrated Ranger in the State of Texas."

Hatfield's eyes narrowed as he wiped his tongue along his cigarette, cementing the paper.

"What makes yuh think that, Doc?"

Trevor ran a finger around the collar

of his butternut shirt.

"I had occasion to ride over to Sollazzo yesterday to send a telegraphic report of my expedition's work to the regents of the University in Austin," Jonas Trevor said levelly. "It so happens that Lieutenant Otis Jennings, of the Sollazzo Ranger office, is a friend of mine."

"So?" Hatfield's voice was noncommittal.

DR. TREVOR stared off across the shimmering gunmetal waters of Haunted Lake.

"As you know, Slim-Jim," Trevor went on, "I have a good many ignorant Mexicans on my pay-roll. It is vital that they remain on the job until I finish draining this lake. If the Ghost in Golden Armor should put in an appearance, my crews would desert *en masse*. For that reason, I have frequently appealed to Lieutenant Jennings to send Rangers over here to protect the University's interests."

Hatfield cursed mentally. Lieutenant Jennings, it would appear, had talked out of turn.

"This Ranger yuh speak of—he told yuh I was Jim Hatfield?"

Trevor's thin lips bent in a smile above his spade beard.

"Not exactly. Jennings reassured me that Captain McDowell had assigned his famous Lone Wolf to the scene of the Ghost's activities. Jim Hatfield rides a golden sorrel, Goldy, which is as famous as the Lone Wolf. You appear to answer the descriptions I have heard of Hatfield. Husky, handsome, intelligent."

Receiving no reply, Trevor leaned his elbows on the desk and scanned the Ranger quizzically.

"If you *are* a Texas Ranger, there is no reason for keeping that fact a secret in my presence, Slim-Jim. As leader of this expedition, I have a lot at stake. It would ease my mind to know that you are more than what you claim to be—a saddle tramp."

Hatfield drew in a long breath. He had many questions to ask of this scientist, the first man who had actually seen the Ghost in Golden Armor. Knowing that Trevor already had guessed his secret—thanks to the loose tongue of Lieutenant Jennings over at Sollazzo—Hatfield decided to come into the open.

Unfastening the secret compartment in his belt, the Lone Wolf gave Dr. Trevor a brief glimpse of a silver star whose points touched a silver ring—the time-honored badge of the Texas Rangers.

"I would appreciate yore keepin' my secret, Doctor Trevor," Hatfield said, replacing the law badge. "The Ghost could be anybody—one of yore Mexican workmen, yore assistant, Professor Weston, yore host, Quentin Fremont. I'm shore yuh understand—"

Trevor made a reassuring gesture with his pipe.

"My lips are sealed, Ranger Hatfield," he said gravely. "Now then. Can I help you in your detective investigation in any way? Might I ask if you have uncovered any clues so far that might point to the identity of this fiend?"

Hatfield shook his head, preferring to keep Trevor in ignorance of the fact that the Ghost had made an attempt on the lives of Fremont and Donna Weston, that

[*Turn page*]

Three Exciting Action Novels of the Fighting West!

•

THE TRAIL HORDE, by CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

THE ROUND-UP, by CLARENCE E. MULFORD

LONESOME RIVER RANGE, by R. M. HANKINS

•

All in the February TRIPLE WESTERN—25c at All Stands!

the Ghost's white horse belonged to Buck Jarbo's Flying J remuda.

"I'd like to hear from yore own lips, Doctor, the story of yore first meetin' with the Ghost, six years ago."

Trevor waggled his head to and fro somberly.

"That was when Doctor Rudolphe Gosche and myself brought the first expedition over here to investigate Haunted Lake," he said. "At the same time we were engaged in surveying the traces of the old Spanish trails over which Coronado and his men entered what is now the United States."

Stepping inside his tent, Trevor unlocked a field trunk and returned with a framed photograph which he handed to Jim Hatfield. It was a picture of four men, dressed in cotton shorts, knee boots and sun helmets, a photograph taken against a background of the Navajada Mountain range.

The only men in the picture whom Hatfield recognized was Dr. Trevor and himself.

"The big man wearing the monocle," Trevor explained, "is the famous Doctor Gosche, perhaps the most outstanding European archaeologist of all time. It was Doctor Gosche who translated the ancient parchments in Madrid which led him to believe that this Haunted Lake is the body of water where the *conquistadores* dumped ten muleloads of Montezuma's Aztec treasure, four hundred-odd years ago. That same parchment gave the first mention on record of the phantom who appears on moonlight nights in golden armor, riding a white horse—the Ghost in Golden Armor."

HATFIELD studied the photograph with grim interest. Dr Rudolphe Gosche had been a veritable giant, towering at least six feet eight inches in height. In the photograph, his lips were peeled back to expose a set of dazzling white teeth, so bright that they had made a halation on the photographic emulsion.

"You are doubtless curious to know why Doctor Gosche has such a dazzling smile," chuckled Trevor. "Those are false teeth, tipped with platinum instead of gold. Most unusual dentures. But then, Doctor Gosche was a most unusual man in all respects."

Hatfield handed the picture back to the scientist.

"This photograph," Trevor said, "was taken the day before our party was attacked from ambush by the Ghost in Golden Armor. I personally saw Doctor Gosche fall with a bullet in his skull. The other two men were surveyors. What happened to them, I do not know. Their bodies were never found."

Hatfield eyed Jonas Trevor quizzically.

"Why," he asked, "didn't the Ghost include you in his massacre plans?"

TREVOR stroked the carved bowl of his meerschaum, a misty off-focus look softening his gaze.

"I assure you, Hatfield, I *was* an intended victim of the Ghost's attack. His first bullet grazed my cranium."

Trevor removed his tropical helmet to reveal a livid scar along the left side of his skull.

"It would have been far better for the world of science if Doctor Gosche, instead of myself, had lived to report that massacre," Trevor went on modestly. "As it was, I happened to be astride a fast, powerful horse at the time the Ghost opened fire on our survey camp out in the Navajada foot slopes. The shot knocked me out. I was in the outskirts of Sollazzo town when I came to. I told my story to the local sheriff, who organized a posse and returned with me to the scene of the ambush. No traces of Doctor Gosche or my two surveyors were ever found."

Hatfield pursed his lips thoughtfully. All that Trevor had told him was not news.

Hatfield had seen a transcript of Trevor's testimony in the files of Roaring Bill McDowell's Ranger office in Austin.

"Yuh believe that this Ghost attacked yuh because he knew yore expedition aimed to solve the secret of Haunted Lake?" the Ranger asked.

Jonas Trevor laughed shortly.

"What other motive could the Ghost have had? The Ghost did not make another appearance until the University established a trust fund to continue its explorations in the Haunted Lake area. As you know, three Texas Rangers went into the *brasada* to track down the Ghost. None returned alive."

Hatfield smiled skeptically.

"Do I understand that you, a man of science, have come to believe that this killer is actually the spirit of a Spaniard who has been dead four hundred years, Doctor?"

Before Trevor could answer, a drumroll of hoofbeats came running downwind and a lone rider rounded the scientist's tent. His lather-flecked line-back dun mare halted a few yards from where Hatfield and Trevor were seated.

"Why, it's Charlie Cameron, our civil engineer!" exclaimed Jonas Trevor, rising quickly to his feet. "He's back a week earlier than I expected. His survey of the Old Spanish Trail was—"

Even as Jim Hatfield turned around to stare at the surveyor, he saw young Cameron sway in the saddle and pitch to the ground, landing as limply as a sack of oats.

"Charlie! He's hurt!"

Hatfield kicked back his stool and raced over to where the young engineer had fallen. Then it was that he caught sight of an antique Spanish dagger that was jutting from Cameron's back, its Toledo blade driven to the haft in the engineer's ribs.

"Doc—bring water!" rasped the Texas Ranger, as Trevor started to kneel beside the wounded surveyor. "We'll have to rush Cameron over to the medico in Sollazzo. He's dying!"

A PAROXYSM of agony wracked the engineer's body, causing him to roll over on his side. Crimson froth bubbled from the corners of his mouth and his eyes rolled wildly, stark terror in their glazed depths.

"Ghost—Golden Armor!" choked the man, gargling the blood which welled in his throat. "Last night—jumped me at my camp—after I found . . . Well of Bones. Terrible! Well of Bones. I—"

A long shudder ran through Charlie Cameron then. Trevor snapped out of his dazed trance and got to his feet, mumbling brokenly:

"I'll—hitch my buckboard—get Charlie to a doctor."

Hatfield, feeling for a pulse in the engineer's wrist, shook his head grimly.

"Yuh'll be takin' Cameron to the coroner, Doctor. He's dead."

CHAPTER XI

Navajada Disaster

STARTING to tug the Spanish dagger from Cameron's back, Hatfield decided against it. Removal of that instrument of death was the official duty of the Sollazzo coroner.

Thoughts churned through the Ranger's head as he stared at Cameron's horror-twisted face. He was remembering Donna Weston's words following their wild ride out of the Flying J *brasada* last midnight. Donna had spoken more truly than she knew when she had believed that the Ghost in Golden Armor had been heading for this young surveyor's camp over in the Navajada foothills.

"History is repeating itself," Jonas Trevor's shocked monotone broke through Hatfield's revery. "Luke Weston and I will be the next victims marked for the Ghost's vengeance. Any one connected with draining Lago Espantosa is marked for doom."

Hatfield stopped to pick up the dead man, and carried his limp burden over behind the tent where Trevor parked the buckboard wagon he used for hauling supplies from Sollazzo. He found a tarp in the wagon box and reverently covered Charlie Cameron's body.

Professor Weston, mounted on a leggy *pelicano* saddle horse, rode up to Trevor's camp. He was learning the news of Cameron's death from his fellow scientist when Hatfield returned from the wagon.

"This settles it, Doctor Trevor!" snapped the harsh-tempered archaeologist, piling his hands on the saddle horn. "The treasure we may or may not find in this lake isn't important enough for me to risk my life and my daughter's life. I intend to return to Austin immediately."

Trevor shrugged, meeting his associate's fear-stricken gaze.

"I plan to dynamite the dam this week and empty the lake, Professor," he pointed out gently. "Surely you will remain here long enough to see whether the lake bottom reveals Montezuma's lost treasure."

Weston started to snap back an an-

swer, then broke off as he saw Jim Hatfield tightening his saddle girth and mounting Goldy. The Ranger rode over to where Trevor was standing beside Weston's stirrup.

"I intend to follow Cameron's trail back to wherever the Ghost stabbed him, Doctor," the Ranger said grimly. "You will see that the body is taken to Sollazzo?"

Trevor nodded, his face harsh-etched with grief. It was obvious that Cameron, who had been Trevor's protegé, was a partner and friend of the scientist's, one whose loss was irreplacable.

"Luck to you, Slim-Jim," Trevor said. "If it will help any, I will post a thousand-dollar reward for the capture of Charlie's slayer—preferably dead."

Hatfield heard Luke Weston's lamenting voice as he spurred over to pick up the tracks of Cameron's horse:

"Charlie's life is on my conscience, Doctor. It was I who insisted on finishing that survey of the Spanish Trail, not you."

Half a mile away from Haunted Lake, Hatfield encountered the Rafter Q Mexicans driving their wagonload of posts and fence wire out from the ranch. Giving the *pelados* orders to carry on their work in his absence, Hatfield set off toward the southwest, following the clear trail of Charlie Cameron's mount. Frequent splashes of bright red blood on the trail made tracking the line-back dun simple enough.

The trail led to the *brasada* thickets and Hatfield soon found himself lost in the oppressive, constricting jungle of mesquites and whitebrush, golden *huisache* with its cloying smell of honey, thorny junco and wiry *chaparo prieto* scrub. The path he was following was a maze of forking trails, forcing Hatfield to dismount frequently to make sure of his route.

In a general way, he knew where Charlie Cameron had been camped—on the upper reaches of Buck Jarbo's Flying J range, against the *barranca*-gashed foot slopes of the Navajadas. It was in this same general area that the Ghost in Golden Armor had ambushed Hube Overmile, lashing his corpse to saddle and sending him back to Sollazzo. In this peril-packed terrain, too, Texas Ranger Curtis Bjorquest and Ben Danefield had vanished without trace, during the past winter.

All three of those Rangers had been personal friends of Jim Hatfield's. Avenging their deaths gave him a keen incentive for bringing the Ghost to justice.

IT was mid-afternoon when the Lone Wolf discovered that he was not alone in the *brasada*. A rider was following him, somewhere back in the jungles.

Every nerve taut as wire, Hatfield reined Goldy off the trail which Charlie Cameron had followed that morning and dismounted in the dense shade of a *retama* bush. Holding a hand over the sorrel's nostrils to make sure Goldy did not give a betraying whicker, Hatfield palmed a Colt .44 an knelt in the shadows, listening to the noisy passage of a rider overtaking him.

His veins pounded as he contemplated the identity of the horseman who was obviously trailing him.

The Ghost in Golden Armor! That seemed unlikely. The phantom of the *brasada* traveled with secretive silence.

He did not have long to wait. Earing back the knurled hammer of his six-gun, Jim Hatfield stepped out into the trail as Professor Luke Weston came abreast of his ambush, mounted on his lathe-flecked *pelicano* saddler.

"Hold it, Prof!" rasped the Lone Wolf, tipping up his Colt to cover the scientist. "Going somewhere?"

Weston jerked nervously in saddle, staring down at the lawman's Colt muzzle. Something akin to panic gleamed in the archaeologist's eyes as he raised them to meet Hatfield's stare.

"I was trying to overtake you, Slim-Jim," panted Weston. "I know where Cameron had his camp. I thought I might be of assistance."

Hatfield, observing that Weston was unarmed, pouched his .44 Peacemaker and led Goldy out from behind the *retama* motte.

"All right, Professor. It just makes me boogery, havin' somebody on my back trail. You lead the way."

Weston rode forward. Hatfield mounted and sent Goldy after the Professor. He had a lively distrust for Donna's crusty-tempered father, as well as a personal dislike which he knew was mutual. As yet, he was not sure of Weston's motives in following him into the Navajada brakes.

Half a mile further on, they reached the

brush-choked mouth of a small canyon, where a pup tent was pitched alongside a burbling spring. While the horses quenched their thirst, Luke Weston pointed out Charlie Cameron's theodolite, mounted on its tripod near the tent.

"The old Coronado trail went up this gorge," Weston explained. "This was where Charlie made his last camp. It was my fault that Charlie was killed. I shouldn't have sent a lone engineer out here."

Hatfield dismounted and made a brief circuit of the camp, locating the ashes of a dead campfire where Cameron had cooked his meals. Then, going inside the pup-tent, he saw a puddle of sticky blood staining the surveyor's bedroll.

He went back to where Weston was hitching his *pelicano* to a juniper snag beyond the spring.

"Cameron was stabbed while he slept last night," Hatfield reported. "The Ghost must have left him for dead, but Cameron must have found the strength to saddle his hoss and ride back to Haunted Lake."

Weston surveyed the surrounding cliffs and brushy slopes with ill-concealed alarm.

"What do we do now?" he quavered. "Now that we're here, this trip seems a trifle unnecessary."

Hatfield shook his head. "With his dyin' words, Charlie Cameron said somethin' about discoverin' a 'Well of Bones.' Does that mean anything to you, Professor Weston?"

Weston looked puzzled. He shook his head.

"Well of Bones?" he repeated. "Cameron must have been delirious, babbling nonsense, gibberish."

For some reason, Hatfield got the idea that Weston knew more about the cryptic Well of Bones than he was admitting.

"Cameron had his full senses before he died, Professor. Whatever the Well of Bones was, it put the devil's own terror into Cameron's mind. I believe the Ghost killed Cameron because he discovered that Well of Bones."

THE sun had already dipped below the jagged crest of the Navajadas, filling the roundabout landscape with deep shadows. Hunting for clues as to where the Ghost in Golden Armor had hitched his white horse before approaching Cameron's tent would be impossible until morning.

"I'm campin' here for the night, Weston," Hatfield spoke up. "You can go back to Haunted Lake if yuh want to. Donna may be worried about yuh."

Weston shuddered. "I—I will stay with you, Slim-Jim. I wouldn't dare ride back through that *brasada* alone, I don't mind admitting. Courage to face the unknown isn't the character trait of a college teacher, much as I am ashamed to admit it."

In his haste to follow Cameron's trail, Hatfield had not brought along provisions for an overnight camp, not even so much as a canteen. Weston, however, had had the forethought to slip a bottle of coffee into his saddle-bags before leaving Trevor's camp. He produced the coffee, along with a pair of tin cups and a pot for warming the beverage.

Hatfield scraped together enough dry leaves and mesquite faggots to get a fire going. While the coffee was warming, the Ranger rummaged inside Charlie Cameron's tent and brought out a side of bacon, a tin of peaches, and part of a loaf of bread.

Night gathered while they were eating. When the coffee came to a boil, Weston filled a cup with the steaming liquid and handed it to Jim Hatfield.

The Ranger was putting the cup to his lips when something he saw in Weston's gaze started a warning tocsin to ringing somewhere in the recesses of his mind.

He waited until Weston had poured himself a cup of coffee, then reached out to take the cup from the man's hand.

"We'll swap coffee cups, just for luck, Professor!" the Lone Wolf said edgily. "Any objections?"

By the shutturing glare of the campfire, Weston raised a startled face to stare at the Ranger.

"Of course not," he grumbled. "You're as nervous and jumpy as I am, Slim-Jim. What's eating you?"

Hatfield grinned and said nothing. He thought, "If you should be the Ghost in Golden Armor, yuh wouldn't be above trying to poison me, Weston."

But Weston swigged deeply from the beverage he had offered Hatfield, draining the cup to its dregs. Suddenly embar-

rassed by his own unfounded suspicions, Hatfield finished off his own cup of the bitter, unsweetened drink.

"The Ghost paid this camp a visit last night," Hatfield said, when they had finished their meal. "He might come back. For that reason, I aim to stay on guard all night."

Weston eyed the roundabout blackness and drew closer to the reassuring warmth of the campfire.

"I have a headache, Slim-Jim," he said. "I think I'll turn in. If you hear anything suspicious, be sure to wake me. I have no desire to be knifed in my sleep as poor Cameron was."

Weston hauled a blanket out of Cameron's tent, inspected it to make sure it was free of the surveyor's life-blood blots, rolled himself up alongside the campfire and was soon snoring.

Hatfield checked Goldy's picket pin and withdrew to the opposite wall of the canyon mouth, settling himself down for an all-night vigil. He became aware of a throbbing ache in his head, and was reminded of the complaint which Weston had made a few minutes before. Unaccountably, he felt a drowsy ennui flooding through his being.

Without knowing it, the Texas Ranger dozed off, his body going slack as complete unconsciousness claimed him. His last conscious sensation was the bitter taste of Weston's coffee lingering on his tongue...

A LOP-SIDED moon rose over the Texas badlands an hour later. Somewhere afar off, a coyote mourned on a ridge. Hoot owls winged overhead in search of nocturnal prey. A lizard scuttled through the leaves, raced over Hatfield's booted legs.

The campfire had died to a bed of glowing coals when a blur of movement took shape on the trail below Cameron's survey camp. A rider on a snow-white stallion, a mysterious figure in gleaming golden armor, with a crimson plume fluttering from a visored helmet.

Dismounting with a metallic clanking sound, the Ghost in Golden Armor walked over to prod Weston's inert figure with a metal-toed boot. He lifted his visor for a closer look at the sleeping professor, then lowered the helmet hood and, gripping the jewel-encrusted butts of his antique horse-pistols, strode over to where Jim Hatfield lay motionless on the ground.

Kneeling, the phantom of the *brasada* reached out with metal-gloved hands to remove the Lone Wolf Ranger's twin six-guns from holster.

A bat wheeled across the moon, which hung low in the Texas sky like a sightless eye in the face of a corpse. In the background, the Ghost's white Arabian steed was nibbling at the neck of the Ranger's horse, Goldy.

CHAPTER XII

The Well of Bones

HOT Texas sunlight was burning the back of Jim Hatfield's neck when his senses rallied, leaving his brain throbbing with each sledge-hammer beat of his heart. For a moment, he was unable to orient himself with his surroundings. Then he realized that he was astride Goldy, and that the sorrel was heading along the rocky trail pointed toward the looming granite summit of the Navajadas.

Twisting in saddle, Hatfield became aware for the first time that his arms were pinioned behind his back with his own lass'-rope. A hackamore led from his saddle-horn to a horse trailing Goldy.

Craning his neck, the Ranger was dumfounded to see Professor Luke Weston, similarly trussed, bringing up the rear astride his *pelicano* pony. Weston's eyes were glazed with terror. He stared at Hatfield without seeing him.

A musical clank of metal brought Hatfield's head around to face the front. What he saw snapped him back to full consciousness.

The Ghost in Golden Armor was leading this cavalcade up the rocky trail. Texas sunshine glinted dazzlingly from the Ghost's helmet and the back plates of his corselet. Twin horse pistols swung from the Ghost's flanks, their stocks richly decorated with diamonds and rubies.

The only thing that smacked of reality in this impossible scene was the brand on the rump of the Ghost's *blanco* Arabian horse—the Flying J.

It took Hatfield a full minute to comprehend the fact that somehow he had become a captive of the *brasada* phantom. For some inexplicable reason, he had drifted off to sleep last night, back at Charlie Cameron's ill-fated camp. The Ghost must have tied him and the Professor up while they slept, loaded them on their own horses, and set out through the Navajadas.

But why hadn't all this activity awakened him? Hatfield's head ached, but it was not due to a clubbed skull. The ache was a sluggish throb, deep-seated.

Then Hatfield believed he had the answer. That coffee which Professor Weston had served him, which he had instinctively felt was poisoned! That coffee must have been drugged with chloral hydrate crystals, accounting for its bitter taste. Knock-out drops.

The Ghost in Golden Armor suddenly reined the *blanco* stallion to a halt and swung out of stirrups, his metal suit chiming musically with each movement of his body. The scarlet plume fluttered in the chill breeze as the Ghost loosened the dallies of the trail rope fastened to Goldy's bridle ring.

As Weston's *pelicano* halted alongside Hatfield's stirrup, the Ghost in Golden Armor led the Arab stud to one side, then turned to face his prisoners. Drawing his fiintlock pistols, the phantom rider motioned Hatfield and the Professor to dismount.

Clumsily, due to the fact that their arms were lashed behind their backs, the two prisoners slid out of saddles. For the first time they realized that the Ghost in Golden Armor had led them to a glacial pothole which made a deep pit in the mountain ledge, a natural cistern some ten feet across and approximately twelve feet deep.

"All right, Jarbo!" snarled Hatfield, finding his voice at last. "What is this—another bear pit deal?"

The helmeted head turned in their direction, unseen eyes peering at them through the slits in the closed visor.

Without speaking, the Ghost in Golden Armor motioned with his horse pistols, gesturing first at his prisoners, then at the yawning pit beside him.

"He wants us to jump into that hole, Slim-Jim!" moaned Professor Weston. "He means to leave us here to die!"

FORCED by an impelling curiosity, the Lone Wolf stepped three paces forward and started down into the glacial pothole. What he saw brought a fine line of sweat-beads pearling his upper lip. The pothole was floored with the accumulated dust and leaves and twings of a millenium of time, deposited there by vagrant winds and erosion. But there was something else in the bottom of this pit.

Bones—human bones!

No less than six human skulls leered up at them with grinning batteries of teeth from the bottom of that hole, regarding them with ghostly eye-sockets. Hatfield saw the disintegrated remains of human ribs latticing the debris, disconnected vertebrae, splintered leg and arm bones.

"This—this is the Well of Bones that Charlie Cameron discovered!" burst out Luke Weston. "The Well of Bones he mentioned with his dying breath!"

The Ghost in Golden Armor sidled around behind the two prisoners as they stood staring at the grisly relics below. Too late, the Ghost's intentions penetrated Hatfield's still drugged brain. He spun about in time to see the phantom lunging at him, his armor-clad shoulder catching Hatfield in the midriff.

Off-balance, unable to use his arms to defend himself, the Texas Ranger felt himself driven off his feet by the Ghost's headlong rush. Then he was plummeting through empty space, to land with a jarring impact on a scatter of human skeletons twelve feet below the overhanging rim of the pothole.

Shaking his head dazedly to clear it, Hatfield rolled himself to one side as Luke Weston's trussed form hurtled down, to land beside him. A shriek of pure anguish escaped the Professor's lips as a leg buckled under him. One glance at the twisted shin told Hatfield that Weston had suffered a broken tibia.

Pulling himself to a sitting position, Hatfield tried to blot out the sound of Weston's agonized moans. Staring straight up at the disk of blue sky, he saw the Ghost in Golden Armor peering down at them, eyes glittering venomously behind the slitted visor of his helmet.

Then their mysterious captor vanished

and the sound of steel-shod hoofs on the rocky ledge told Hatfield that the Ghost was leaving the scene of death.

Hatfield got shakily to his feet and stared down at the quivering figure of Luke Weston.

"Reckon I owe yuh an apology, Professor," muttered the Ranger. "I thought there was a chance mebbe you were the Ghost. I reckon this proves—"

His voice trailed off as he realized that Weston had lost consciousness due to the pain of his broken shin.

Hatfield stared around, surveying the litter of shattered human bones. *Zopilote* buzzards had long since picked the flesh from the skeletal remains of these six human beings who, like themselves, had been hurled into what Charlie Cameron had called the Well of Bones. Whether they had starved to death in this gruesome cavity in the Navajada mountains, or whether they had been dead before being hurled into this charnal pit, Hatfield had no way of knowing.

Then he caught sight of a peculiar object amid the pile of bleached skulls and battered pelvic bones. A star inside a circle of tarnished silver.

A Texas Ranger badge!

A moment later, Hatfield located another Ranger star lying amid a litter of human ribs. The sight of those two emblems of the law told their own grisly story to the Lone Wolf.

"So this is what became of Curt Bjorquest and Ben Danefield," he murmured. "Pitched into the Well of Bones by the Ghost they came into the *brasada* to arrest."

There could be no doubting that two of these skeletons belonged to the Rangers whom Lieutenant Otie Jennings had dispatched from Sollazzo to solve the mystery of the *brasada* phantom. One of the skulls still had the scalp intact, reddish hair mixed with silver, which Hatfield identified as Ben Danefield's. Another skull, with patches of blond Nordic hair sprouting from it, he knew had been Curt Bjorquest's.

Who, then, were the other men who had died here?

STALKING around the floor of the glacial pothole, Hatfield made another surprising discovery.

He found a skeleton of unusual length—well over six feet—lying apart from the rest. The skull had not been molested by the rending talons and beaks of predatory buzzards, and the hot, dry air of the Texas uplands had mummified the face.

Still set in position over one of the hollow eye sockets was a monocle, its furbished glass glittering in the morning sunrays. And the skull was smiling ghostly at Hatfield, the set of false teeth capped with platinum.

"This'll be Doctor Rudolphe Gosche, then!" whispered the Texas Ranger, a horrified shudder shaking his body. "The famous German scientist who was the Ghost's first victim—complete with platinum dentures and eye-glass."

Having identified the long-missing Berlin archaeologist, it was easy enough to come to the conclusion that the other skeletons here in the Well of Bones belonged to members of the ill-fated scientific expedition sent here by Alamo University six years previously.

Their fate had been a mystery until the young surveyor, Charlie Cameron, had stumbled across this grave pit while making his survey of the old Spanish route of conquest across the Suicide Strip. And Cameron had paid with his life for finding the Ghost's Boot Hill of victims.

Hatfield turned away from the tumbled bones, to which his and Weston's might well be added before many days. When the sun rose to the zenith, the smooth granite walls of this pit would become unbearably hot, radiating heat like the boiler of a steam engine. Death from thirst and starvation could not be long delayed.

Getting out of the Well of Bones was an impossibility, Hatfield decided at first glance. The walls of the glacial pothole had been scoured to a marblelike slickness by the elements which had created it. Even if they had the use of their hands, Hatfield knew the rim of the pit was too high to reach without a ladder. So far as that was concerned, the rimrock might as well be a hundred feet overhead instead of a mere twelve.

A shadow fell across the floor of the pit and Hatfield tensed, looking up with the expectation of seeing the Ghost in Golden Armor standing there, taunting his latest victims. But it was Goldy, his sorrell, standing on the brink of the Well

of Bones peering down at him in faithful vigil over his helpless rider.

"Good old Goldy! If only yuh'd head back to the Rafter Q and bring help!"

But Hatfield, knowing Goldy, realized that such a thing was hopeless. The sorrel would remain here long after Hatfield was dead. Such were the qualities of loyalty which his equine partner had always displayed in the past.

Weston was beginning to stir, moaning piteously. The Professor was obviously in intense pain, might become a berserk, raving maniac before this terrible day was over.

Peering up at the brassy Texas sky, the Ranger's mouth hardened as he caught sight of wheeling black specks circling against the zenith. Buzzards, harbingers of death, waiting to swoop down on human carrion here in the Well of Bones. Those winged scavengers of the desert knew that escape was impossible for these trapped men. The time was not far off when they would swoop into the glacial pit for a macabre feast.

Worst of all, Jim Hatfield knew that the Professor's sanity and his own probably would snap long before death assuaged their sufferings here.

CHAPTER XIII

Jarbo Strikes

DONNA WESTON paced the floor of her bedroom in the Rafter Q ranchhouse, unable to occupy herself with letter-writing, sewing or any other pursuit while her brain was a cauldron of conflicting worries and conjectures. More than twenty-four hours had elapsed since her father had set out for the Navajadas, in hope of catching up with the cowboy, Slim-Jim, who was back-tracking Charlie Cameron's last ride.

The young surveyor's death, reported to her by Mexican *vaqueros* returning from their fence-building job over at Haunted Lake, had been a severe blow to the girl. While she had never reciprocated Cameron's love when they were students together at college, she had cherished him with a sisterly affection.

Last night, upon learning that her father had left to join Slim-Jim out in the badlands, she had saddled a horse with the intention of following him, even with darkness coming on. But Quent Fremont had blocked that plan by detaining her forcibly.

"I love yuh, Donna," he had told her gravely. "I know well enough how worried yuh are, with yore dad trying to help scout down Charlie's killer. But if yuh think I'm goin' to let yuh out of my sight as long as the Ghost in Golden Armor is on the prowl, yuh don't know yore future husband very well."

She had wound up by giving Fremont her word of honor not to leave the ranch. Fremont had left two of his trusted cowhands on the ranch throughout the day, ostensibly to mend harness and shoe a span of mules, but in reality to make certain that Donna came to no harm.

Hearing hoofbeats approaching the Rafter Q, Donna rushed to the window, hoping to see her father riding in on his *pelicano* saddler. Instead it was young Fremont, back from supervising the building of his fence around Haunted Lake.

Donna hurried out to greet him. One look at his strained, bleak face told him that he had no news of her father or of Slim-Jim.

"Doctor Trevor took Charlie's body over to Sollazzo," Fremont told her gravely. "He brought back a wagonload of dynamite. He plans to blast the bank and open the drainage ditch as soon as he can plant his explosive charges. I wish yore father was back, to share Doc's glory if they do bring back that Aztec treasure to light. It would be the greatest moment in Luke's life."

Donna brushed a trembling hand across her eyes.

"I'm going frantic, not knowing what may have happened to Dad," she said tremulously. "Couldn't you and I ride over to the Navajadas and find Charlie's survey camp?"

Fremont regarded her thoughtfully, wondering if he knew the true motive back of her worry.

"Is it Slim-Jim yuh're afraid of, Donna?" he asked gently. "Yuh hate to have yore father ridin' the back country with a man who may be a killer—an outlaw on the dodge?"

She met his eyes squarely. She had not told him of her ride to the Flying J, where she had rescued Slim-Jim from Jarbo's bear pit. The news would have added another burden of worry to Fremont's already hectic life.

"It's the Ghost in Golden Armor I'm afraid of—not Slim-Jim," she said earnestly. "I don't believe Slim-Jim is an outlaw."

Fremont shrugged. "When a man don't tell his name . . . Yore father believes Slim-Jim is hidin' somethin'."

Before she could answer, a roar of sound funneled down across the Rafter Q grounds and a body of fast-riding horsemen burst out of the *brasada* jungle beyond the barns. Recognizing the rider who led the cavalcade straight toward his ranchhouse, Quent Fremont seized Donna by the arm.

"That's Buck Jarbo!" he rasped, dropping hand to Colt stock. "Get back in the house, Donna! I think my neighbor is ridin' in lookin' for trouble."

Donna reached up to plant a kiss on Fremont's mouth.

"I'll go in the house, darling," she said grimly, "and I'll be covering you with a shotgun in case Jarbo tries to bait you into a gun fight."

She had barely made the front door of the house when Buck Jarbo came hammering up, mounted on a deep-brisketed blue roan gelding. He had a dozen Flying J riders with him, including his foreman, Highpockets.

FREMONT stood with hands on gun holsters as he sized up the hostile faces glaring down at him. Buck Jarbo was more than a little drunk and the knife scar stood out lividly against the blue stubble of his cheek.

"I got a couple things to palaver with you, Fremont!" snarled the ex-convict, hooking a booted leg over his pommel. "First off, what's this I hear about yuh stringin' bobwire fence around Haunted Lake?"

Knots of muscle stood out on Fremont's jaws. He knew that his life might be in the balance, during these next few moments. Jarbo was making a cigarette, his hands well away from his own Colts, but a nod of the head from the Flying J rustler could sense his men to open fire at point-blank range.

"I fenced off the lake, yeah!" retorted Fremont, flashing a quick glance over his shoulder at the house. Donna Weston stood in the shadows of the open doorway, holding a sawed-off shotgun cocked. "I threw up that fence just in case yuh got the idea of hazin' Flyin' J beef across my range, Jarbo."

The Flying J boss fired his quirly and blew twin jets of smoke through this bulbous nose.

"We'll forget the fence for the time bein', neighbor," he sneered. "What I'm worried about is that Doc Trevor and his gang o' Mexicanos, diggin' that ditch to empty the lake. That's a lot of water to waste, Fremont—water our cattle need bad, with a summer drought shapin' up."

Fremont's slitted eyes shuttled over the men behind Jarbo, alert for the first hostile move of a gun that would telegraph their intentions of cutting him down. This was the first time Jarbo and his crew had ever invaded the Rafter Q's home headquarters this way. Some sort of a showdown must have motivated this show of force on Jarbo's part.

The waters of Lago Espantosa had long been the crux of the feud between the Flying J and the Rafter Q. Fremont's father had died defending the water.

"As yuh well know, Jarbo," Quent Fremont said levelly, "Alamo University and the State of Texas are financin' Doc Trevor's job of drainin' that lake. If they find what they're lookin' for, or if they don't, they'll dam up that drainage ditch and the lake will refill in a few weeks' time. Even so, Flyin' J wouldn't be concerned. Yuh're not bamboozlin' me into sharin' that water with yuh, Jarbo."

Jarbo puffed savagely at his cigarette, holding his temper under a tight curb.

"Yuh're finished on the Rafter Q, Fremont," he said grimly. "That's one reason I come over here today—to tell yuh that. If yuh won't stop Trevor from drainin' that water supply, huntin' for Aztec gold that prob'ly ain't, then the Flyin' J will step in and see that Trevor and his Mexicanos move out pronto."

Fremont squared his shoulders resolutely. He was wishing that Donna was nowhere around. In case of a showdown, her shotgun would be of little use. Jarbo's crew could lay siege to the Rafter Q house

and burn it down over her head.

"Yuh said yuh had a couple of things to make *habla* about, Jarbo," Fremont said, playing for time. "My fence was Number One. What's Number Two?"

Jarbo's attitude changed. He raked the surrounding ranch yard with his beady eyes, his gaze coming to rest on Fremon't's cavvy corral, sizing up the saddle horses there.

"Yeah," Jarbo rumbled. "So I did have something else on my mind. Where yuh hidin' Jim Hatfield?"

Fremont looked puzzled.

"Jim Hatfield? What yuh drivin' at?"

Jarbo flipped his cigarette butt aside with an angry jerk.

"The Lone Wolf Texas Ranger. He's on yore payroll as a bronc-stomper. Friday night he was over on Flyin' J—until yore girl come over and brought him back here."

Fremont cuffed back his John B and scratched his head.

"First I knew about it," he muttered. "Yuh must be talkin' about Slim-Jim, the new hand I hired."

Jarbo nodded. "Slim-Jim, eh? Yuh didn't know yuh'd hired the lass'-rope of the most famous Ranger in Texas, then? Yuh didn't bring Jim Hatfield out here to help fight this range war?"

ONE look at Quent Fremont's puzzled face convinced Jarbo that the Rafter Q man had had no idea of Slim-Jim's true identity.

"Hatfield ain't hidin' on my spread, Jarbo," Fremont said. "Matter of fact, he's out scoutin' for the Ghost in Golden Armor."

Jarbo's hooded orbs flickered with mingled amusement and wonder. Twisting around in saddle, he barked an order to his *segundo,* Highpockets:

"You boys know what to do. Make a thorough job of it. We're wipin' the Rafter Q off the map, here and now!"

Fremont had a gun half-drawn from leather when he found himself staring into the leveled bores of Buck Jarbo's Colt. Behind the Flying J boss, Highpockets and the other owlhoot riders were spreading out fanwise, heading toward the various outbuildings of the Rafter Q spread.

"Hold that draw, son!" chuckled Jarbo, clicking his six-guns to full cock. "I'm burnin' yuh out. Don't make me shoot yuh."

Jarbo turned his head in the direction of the ranchhouse, in time to see Donna drop down on one knee, leveling her double-barreled shotgun at Jarbo.

"Don't yank them triggers, gal!" warned the Flying J boss. "First place, that buckshot would cut down yore sweetheart as quick as it would me. Second place, I could blow Fremon't brains out before yuh could use that greener."

Donna was chalk-white. She knew that the sawed-off weapon in her hands was unreliable at such long range. As Jarbo had said, a shot from this distance might riddle Quent with buckshot.

"We're licked, Donna," Fremont called softly across the distance. "Nothin' we can do but stand by and watch Jarbo burn us out. Don't risk anything."

Despair jelled Fremont's veins as he saw Jarbo's crew go to work with diabolical thoroughness. Highpockets had taken a bottle of kerosene from his saddle-bags and smashed it against a clapboard gable of the Rafter Q hay barn. A lighted match flipped up into the open haymow started an instant conflagration.

Other Flying J riders had fired the blacksmith shop, the granary, the bunkhouse where the Rafter Q Mexicans lived. Within moments, eight separate fires were roaring, sending their columns of smoke mushrooming into the Texas sky.

Donna laid her shotgun aside, knowing the futility of making a stand. All that Fremont and his father before him had worked for was going up in smoke today. Buck Jarbo had carried the long-standing range feud to an unexpected climax, striking without warning.

"Toss yore guns over into that hoss trough, Fremont!" Jarbo ordered. "Yuh're lucky I didn't blast yuh down."

Numbly Quent Fremont removed his six-guns from holster and hurled them into a nearby tank, under the windmill derrick. A lone man against Jarbo's crew, he knew that resistance would be foolhardy. If he goaded Jarbo into killing him, it would be tantamount to signing Donna's death warrant as well.

Grinning fiendishly, the one-eared outlaw holstered his own guns and loped

off across the smoke-fouled barnyard. His men, their job of arson completed, had ridden away from the fired buildings to watch the doom of Rafter Q.

Donna fled to Fremont's side as the raiders headed off in the direction of Haunted Lake. Jarbo's next objective, both knew, was to drive Dr. Jonas Trevor and his Mexican gang of workmen out of the country. This time tomorrow, Jarbo's Flying J cattle would be watering at Lago Espantosa.

Moving like a man whose world had literally fallen in ruins about his shoulders, Quent Fremont headed for the corrals to free the panic-stricken animals penned there. The barn roof collapsed with a roar, sending a geyser of sparks leaping toward the sky.

When they had turned the stock loose to stampede away from the flaming buildings, Fremont and Donna Weston moved out on the mesa out of range of the fierce heat. The windmill tower burst into flames, collapsed before their anguished gaze. Only the ranchhouse had been spared the torch. Jarbo's reason for not razing Fremont's home was obvious. Jarbo intended to use the ranchhouse himself, when he took over the Rafter Q range.

"Well, at least we've solved the mystery about Slim-Jim," muttered Fremont bitterly. "Yuh care to tell me what Jarbo was talkin' about—you goin' over to the Flyin' J while I was away the other night, and rescuin' that Texas Ranger?"

Falteringly, the girl told her story of Jarbo's hurling the Lone Wolf into Señor Oso's bear-pit, and her own part in saving the Ranger's life. . . .

LATER—much later, when sundown found Rafter Q a smoldering mass of ashes—a lone rider dismounted in front of Fremont's house. It was Dr. Trevor, weighted down with a despair to match the young ranchers. So absorbed was the archaeologist in his own worries that he did not appear to have noticed the destruction of the Rafter Q's barns and outbuildings.

Donna Weston came out to meet Trevor.

"Jarbo drove off your Mexicans, Doctor?" she asked sympathetically, laying a hand on the scientist's sleeve. "Was there any bloodshed over at the lake this afternoon?"

Jonas Trevor stared at her unseeingly.

"Jarbo?" he echoed blankly. "Jarbo had nothing to do with driving off my crew, Donna. The Ghost in Golden Armor paid a visit to my drainage ditch, while I was setting my dynamite charges there. Those ignorant peons took one look at that spook on the phantom white horse and fled as if the devil were after them. They won't stop this side of Mexico."

Donna could only stare. The Ghost, then, had accomplished what Buck Jarbo had intended to do—drive Trevor's labor gang away from Haunted Lake by playing on the ignorant Mexicans' superstitious natures. Perhaps it was just as well. Jarbo would have used gunsmoke.

A wild, irrational look came into Jonas Trevor's eyes, owlish behind their thick-lensed spectacles. His ginger-colored beard trembled with the intensity of his emotions as he seized Donna's shoulders.

"The Ghost warned me to leave the treasure of Haunted Lake alone, or he would destroy me!" he shouted in a frenzied outburst. "But I don't believe in ghosts, Donna! I'm going to open that drainage ditch if it's the last thing I do! I've got to know if Montezuma's treasure is there. It will be the climax of my professional career!"

CHAPTER XIV

Living Dead Men

EARLY dawn found Jim Hatfield pacing the skeleton-littered floor of the Well of Bones like a caged tiger.

His arms were still pinioned behind his back. At dusk last evening, Professor Weston had recovered consciousness and had made a valiant attempt to loosen Hatfield's bonds with his teeth. He had failed, even as Hatfield had failed to untie the Ghost's knots from Weston's wrists.

The professor had spent the night in agony, but daylight found Hatfield physically refreshed. His stomach was knotted with pain, due to hunger. Weston was feverish, but so far as the Ranger could tell, infection had not set in.

With the coming of daylight, Weston dozed off into a restive slumber, lying on his side. Hatfield knew that neither of them could survive much longer. Yesterday's heat had been intolerable. There was a limit to what human strength could endure, and both of them were dangerously near that limit.

As the Texas sun lifted on its orbit across the cloudless sky, the shadow of the pit rim became less and less. Already the heat was beginning to enervate the Ranger.

Suddenly a blinding flash of sunlight on some polished object made Hatfield blink. He wheeled around, to see that it was the monocle reflecting the sun's rays from the hollow eye socket of the skull of Dr. Rudolph Gosche, the martyred German scientist.

Staring at that glass lens, an idea came to Jim Hatfield's fertile brain. A faint glimmer of hope set his pulses to racing savagely.

Crossing the floor of the pit, Hatfield knelt beside Gosche's grinning skull. His arms were tied at elbow and wrist, but his hands were free.

After a moment's jockeying for position, the Lone Wolf managed to get hold of the German's monocle, already hot to the touch. Gripping the glass disk between thumb and forefinger, Hatfield got to his feet and stepped over to where Weston lay sleeping.

Straddling the professor's body, Hatfield moved around until the sun's rays were streaming through the skull's monocle, converging in a white-hot cone of light. By bending his knees, Hatfield was able to put the focal point of the lens' rays on one of the ropes which bound Professor Weston's arms behind his back.

Within seconds, the burning glass had ignited a strand of the rope and a tiny wisp of smoke spiraled upward.

It was clumsy business, holding the monocle in such a position that it would train the converging rays on Weston's rope. Minutes passed by, during which strand after strand of the hemp charred and parted under the intense heat.

It was the blistering heat of the burning lens touching the flesh of his wrist that brought Luke Weston awake, groaning with agony. But as he reared to a sitting position, his bonds parted and the professor's arms came loose at his sides.

Hatfield stepped back, relief and triumph washing through him in resurgent waves. His parched, blistering lips were spread in a grin as he saw Weston numbly flex his arms, then pull them out of the loose ropes and stare dumbly at his hands.

"I'm free!" croaked the scientist, bewildered. "How—"

"You can thank Doctor Gosche for wearin' a monocle, Weston!" panted Hatfield, getting down on his knees beside the professor. "Now yuh can untie my ropes. We've got a fightin' chance to get out of this purgatory, *amigo!*"

It took Weston fifteen minutes to free Hatfield's trussed arms, so violently were the injured man's hands trembling. When he had finished and Hatfield was uncoiling his loose ropes, Weston lay back against the cushioning bones and groaned pitiously.

"First thing I've got to do is splint that broken shin of yores," Hatfield said. "It's going to hurt, Weston, but it's got to be done."

Weston fainted twice before the Ranger had set the fractured tibia, using human bones for splints. When he had finished, Weston lay spent and gasping, his face rinsed with sweat.

"Thanks—Slim-Jim," whispered the professor. "But it's too late. I'm dying."

HATFIELD, standing so that his shadow shielded Weston's face, shook his head desperately. His greatest fear was that the older man might lose his grip on sanity and turn into a babbling, dangerous maniac.

"Yuh're not dyin', Weston. Men don't die of broken legs. But starvation and heat will get us both if we don't get out of this pit today. Neither of us are much better off than livin' dead men as it is. But now we've got a chance."

Weston made a feeble gesture, unable to share Hatfield's enthusiasm. He was resigned to die, here in the gruesome pit where two Texas Rangers and members of Gosche's expedition had died before them. Even though their arms were free, Weston saw no slightest vestige of hope.

"How can I help?" he asked faintly.

Hatfield gestured toward the rimrock overhead.

"It's twelve feet up there," he said. "I'm six-foot-four. If yuh could clamber up on my shoulders, yuh could grab the rim and hoist yoreself out. Then yuh could lower a rope from yore saddle so that I could climb out."

A wild hope dawned in Weston's anguished eyes.

"I'll try!" he said. "I don't want to die. I want to see my daughter again. I want to beg Donna's forgiveness for all I did, tryin' to break up her engagement to Quent Fremont. I was a selfish ingrate, not worthy to be her father."

But Hatfield's desperate plan was doomed to failure. He got Weston's scrawny bulk atop his shoulders, but the professor was unable to bear his weight on his broken leg, let alone summon the strength to haul himself over the edge of the Well of Bones.

With his hands clutching grassroots outside the pit, that close to safety, Weston fainted dead away and Hatfield was lucky to cushion his fall.

Blocked in what seemed the simplest and surest way to extricate themselves from this bake-oven tomb, Hatfield lost no time in turning to other alternatives. Picking up the lariat which the Ghost had used to tie him with, Hatfield busied himself with unraveling the triple strands of hemp and tying them together. When he had finished, the Ranger had a sturdy rope some eighteen feet long.

Putting fingers between his teeth, the Lone Wolf gave vent to a loud whistle which echoed eerily from the granite walls of the pit. Answering that signal Goldy appeared overhead, snorting nervously.

"Hold steady, old boy!" Hatfield called up to his faithful mount. "Edge around sideways—that's right, Goldy hoss—"

Working with feverish haste, Hatfield fashioned a loop from his makeshift rope.

The objective of his cast was the horn of Goldy's saddle. Three times he made a throw, three times he missed. The fourth try sent the noose over the swellfork pommel and he was pulling the rope taut, testing its knots.

Luke Weston came out of his faint and sat up in time to see Jim Hatfield scaling the rope hand over hand while Goldy stood by, feet braced to support his master's weight.

A frantic cry came from Weston's lips as he saw the saddle cinch slip, dropping Hatfield back.

"Don't leave me here, Slim-Jim—Don't leave me!"

Hatfield grinned reassuringly, got another grip on the rope and started climbing. The saddle was under Goldy's belly now, but the loose girth held.

A moment more, and Hatfield's elbows were resting on the rim of the Well of Bones. Recovering his breath, he seized Goldy's foreleg and pulled himself up and over the rim of the pit.

Weston was babbling hysterically down in the pothole as Hatfield got to his feet and put both arms around Goldy's neck, panting endearments to the faithful sorrel who had been instrumental in saving his life.

"Stop yore caterwaulin', Professor!" the Ranger called back to his companion. "I'm not desertin' yuh."

UNFASTENING the noose from the saddle-horn under Goldy's barrel, Hatfield made a wide loop and tossed the rope down to where Weston was dragging himself across the litter of bones, his brain on the dizzy edge of total insanity.

"Fix that noose under yore armpits, Weston!" Hatfield ordered. "I'll have yuh out of that grave in a jiffy."

Weston obeyed orders with the alacrity of desperation. After tightening the saddle in place on the sorrel's back, Hatfield dallied the end of the rope around the horn and slapped Goldy on the rump.

The horse dragged Weston's limp form up the wall of the pit. Hatfield was on hand to assist the Professor over the edge with a minimum of pain from his splinted leg.

"Yuh're in bad shape, Weston," Hatfield said, carrying the limp scientist over to the trail. "A drink will help yuh. Then we've got to get yuh to a doctor in Sollazzo."

Weston's *pelicano* mount was grazing nearby. A half-filled canteen was buckled to the cantle. Hatfield gave the injured man a drink, then downed a few swallows himself.

It was necessary to tie Weston to the saddle to prevent the scientist from toppling out of stirrups in a faint. But within ten minutes after their escape from the gruesome Well of Bones, Jim Hatfield

was astride Goldy, trailing the *pelicano* at hackamore's end.

Orienting himself by nearby landmarks, from which elevation he could see Jarbo's ranch and the glistening waters of Haunted Lake in the distance, Hatfield set his course toward the southeast, making for Sollazzo.

It was late in the day when the Ranger arrived at the Texas cowtown. The medico there confirmed Hatfield's belief that Luke Weston was in no shape to ride the ten miles to the Rafter Q Ranch.

Leaving Weston with the promise that he would send Donna to Sollazzo as soon as possible, Hatfield made his way to a restaurant to wolf down a much needed meal. He was riding out of Sollazzo when he caught sight of Lieutenant Otie Jennings seated in a rocking chair on the porch of the district headquarters of the Texas Rangers. Jennings stared at the passing rider without recognizing him as Roaring Bill McDowell's top Ranger.

Hatfield decided to forego a visit with Jennings. He intended to chastise him for revealing to Dr. Jonas Trevor the fact that Jim Hatfield was working incognito in the Nueces country. But that could come later. There was a showdown looming over in the Haunted Lake country, a showdown of Hatfield's making.

Night had fallen before Hatfield arrived at Quent Fremont's Rafter Q spread. The heady, pungent odors of burned wood cloyed the atmosphere as Hatfield reined up in front of the lighted windows. The moon had not yet risen, so that it was not until he confronted Fremont and Donna Weston inside the house that Hatfield learned of Buck Jarbo's raid on the Rafter Q.

"Yes, Donna, yore father is alive and safe," Hatfield answered the girl's tearful query. Without mentioning their ordeal at the Well of Bones, he told her that Weston had suffered a broken leg and was hospitalized over in Sollazzo. "First thing in the mornin', yuh'd better take a *pasear* over there and see yore dad." Hatfield grinned. "I think he wants to give you and Quent his blessin'. Professor Weston has had a lot of time to think over things since yuh saw him last."

Donna flung herself on a divan in front of the fireplace and gave way to feminine tears of relief and thanksgiving at the news of her father's safety.

Hatfield turned his attention to Quent Freemont, hearing from the young rancher's lips the story of Jarbo's raid and the Ghost in Golden Armor's ultimatum to Jonas Trevor over at Haunted Lake.

"You bein' a Texas Ranger," Fremont said with a crooked grin, "I don't mind tellin' yuh something, Hatfield. Has it ever occurred to yuh that Buck Jarbo could be the Ghost in Golden Armor? Tryin' to scare me into leaving Rafter Q?"

HATFIELD rubbed his stubbed jaw thoughtfully.

"I've thought for several days now that Jarbo was the Ghost," he said. "Especially after I saw the Flyin' J brand on the Ghost's white Arabian. But I don't believe the Ghost could have been dumpin' Weston and me into the Well of Bones and burnin' out yore ranch at the same time. No, Fremont, I don't think Buck Jarbo is the Ghost."

Fremont blinked uncomprehendingly.

"Well of Bones?" he echoed. "Yuh mean yuh saw the place Charlie Cameron talked about before he died?"

Hatfield fingered the chinstrap of his Stets on and grinned mysteriously.

"The Well of Bones is another story," he said. "One I'll tell yuh about when I have the time. Right now, I'd like to borrow a pair of six-guns, Fremont. I've got an arrest to make tonight."

Fremont went over to a table, slid open a drawer and returned with a pair of well-oiled .44 Frontier Colts.

"Yuh aim to arrest the Ghost in Golden Armor, mebbe?" he asked curiously.

Checking the loads in the Colt cylinders, Hatfield thrust the borrowed guns into his holsters and shook his head.

"Not necessarily," he said, starting for the door. "I'm going over to the Flyin' J tonight and dab my loop on Buck Jarbo. He'll stand trial for burnin' out the Rafter Q, Quent."

A TRUE STORY

MALTBY, THE AVENGER

by HAROLD PREECE

NEXT ISSUE

CHAPTER XV

Death in the Night

MOVING westward through the purple night, guided only by the light of the Texas stars, Jim Hatfield came abreast of Cortez Basin shortly before midnight.

Only the fact that Quent Fremont planned to escort Donna Weston over to Sollazzo to see her father, come daylight, had prevented the young rancher from joining the Ranger on this ride into hostile territory. Fremont had argued eloquently, begging Hatfield to postpone his arrest of Buck Jarbo so that he, Fremont, could be in on the kill.

The Lone Wolf had pointed out that his primary purpose in being at the Rafter Q at all was to solve the Ghost mystery. Arresting Jarbo was secondary, but nonetheless important.

Events were fast shaping up toward a climax here in the Nueces country, Hatfield knew. If Jarbo were allowed one more day, he would probably invade the Rafter Q range with a sizeable herd of cattle, intending to bed them down on the mesa around Haunted Lake.

By arresting Jarbo tonight, Hatfield would be nipping the rustler's plans in the bud, helping Fremont for the loss he had suffered by fire. With Jarbo back behind prison bars—perhaps hanged, when a Texas jury learned how Jarbo had thrown a Texas Ranger into a bear pit—the odds were that Jarbo's gun-hung crew would desert the Flying J, knowing it was no longer safe as an owlhoot hideout.

Such an eventuality would mean that Fremont and Donna, starting out their married life together on the Rafter Q, would be able to rebuild their ruined ranch without the constant oppressive fear of attack from Flying J.

Tracking down the Ghost in Golden Armor was a matter of time, now. Jim Hatfield believed he knew the identity of the *brasada* phantom, as a result of the timetable of the Ghost's activities during the past two days. But the Ranger had given Fremont and Donna no hint as to his suspicions. He wanted to have them witness the unmasking of the diabolical phantom.

A tardy moon had lifted over the Nueces country by the time Goldy had threaded the tortuous miles of the thickets between Cortez Basin and Jarbo's ranch. Riding out of the brush, less than a mile from Jarbo's home ranch, Hatfield saw that the Flying J crew had been busy during the past day, for a big herd of ladino steers were bunched in the open mesa between the home ranch and the sink.

Through the darkness, the Texas Ranger could hear Jarbo's nighthawks crooning to the restless steers, bunched here on the sage flats in preparation for a trail drive on the morrow.

"Jarbo's not wastin' any time gettin' his beef to Haunted Lake—he thinks," muttered Hatfield, reining Goldy to the south so as to keep himself invisible against the background of the rimming *brasada* jungles. "I got my doubts if any Flyin' J critter sticks a muzzle in Lago Espantosa tomorrow, or ever."

A quarter of a mile from Jarbo's ranchhouse, Hatfield reined down to a walk, to prevent Goldy's steel-shod hoofs from telegraphing his approach ahead of him. He doubted if Buck Jarbo was camped out on the flats with his crew. Jarbo was the stripe to hire his hard work done, while he superintended operations from the comfort of his ranchhouse.

The fact that such a sizable herd had been driven out of the brush for the trail drive, however, was in Hatfield's favor tonight.

In all probability he would find Jarbo alone at the Flying J headquarters. That would make the job he had to do just that much easier.

Coming abreast of the ranch grounds, Hatfield ground-tied Goldy and headed on foot toward the dark bulk of Jarbo's adobe house.

It was two o'clock by his watch, which accounted for no lights burning in the Flying J house.

In the deep shade of a barn, the Ranger paused to jack open the Colt .44s he had borrowed from Quent Fremont. He slipped an extra cartridge from his belt loops into the empty chamber he habitually carried under the firing pins.

THEN, easing the big six-guns into leather, Hatfield came out into the open moonlight and headed past the windmill toward Jarbo's house. Across the open compound he saw the pile of ashes marking the ruined crib which Donna Weston had fired. Beyond it was the square fenced-off enclosure surrounding Senor Oso's bear pit. The sight of it put a ripple down Hatfield's backbone, reminding him of the narrowest escape of his adventurous career behind the star.

Midway across the open ground leading to the house, Hatfield was startled to see a light flash on inside the building, in the wing opposite the kitchen. Swiftly, Hatfield raced for the covered dog-walk which linked Jarbo's home with the bunkhouse and messhall.

Was it possible that he had been seen approaching the ranch? He put that out of his mind. If Jarbo knew his arch-enemy was on the Flying J territory, he would not light a lamp. He would more likely lie in wait behind a shuttered window with a rifle.

Hatfield saw twin shadows move across the lighted window. Jarbo and his foreman, Highpockets, must be up and about, then.

The Ranger paused at the corner of the cookshack, undecided at to his next move. At that moment he heard a horse whicker, and stamp the hard adobe earth, out at the rack in front of the Flying J gallery.

Moving on down the dog-walk toward the house, Hatfield came in sight of the front of the building. What he saw there arrested the lawman in his tracks. A snow-white Arabian stallion was hitched to the tie-rack, together which another saddle horse.

"Looks like the Ghost is gettin' set for another night ride!" flashed the thought through Hatfield's head. "Could it be possible I'm wrong—that Jarbo really is the Ghost?"

Hatfield had left the dog-walk and reached the edge of the Flying J porch when he heard Jarbo's voice lifted in a vitriolic stream of profanity inside the main room of the house. The front door banged open and two men crossed the porch, went down the steps and headed toward the waiting horses.

Hatfield's eyes bulged from their sockets, surprise holding him stockstill.

Buck Jarbo, his hands above his head, was being marched out of his own home by a figure dressed in golden armor, a phantom who held the Flying J boss under the menace of two flintlock horse pistols!

Confused thoughts moiled under Hatfield's scalp. He knew his hunch was right, now, Jarbo was not the Ghost in Golden Armor. Instead, the Ghost had come to the Flying J ranch ahead of Jim Hatfield tonight, bent on nailing the very outlaw Hatfield had come to arrest! And Hatfield believed he knew why.

Reaching the hitch-rack, Jarbo mounted the horse which was waiting alongside the Ghost's leggy *blanco* Arab. The shining yellow armor glinted in the moonrays astride the white stallion.

That was the moment the Lone Wolf chose to step out of the shadows, six-guns jutting before him as he headed toward the two riders.

"Hoist 'em, both of yuh!" Hatfield lashed out. "I'll drill the first man who—"

With a wild, inhuman shout issuing from beneath his visored helmet, the Ghost in Golden Armor wheeled the Arab about, driving the *blanco* hard against Jarbo's mount.

Things happened fast in the next instant.

Hatfield's guns blazed in unison but both shots missed as the two horses separated, bucking wildly. The Ghost triggered a horse pistol at Jim Hatfield, an instant before the gold-clad figure got behind Jarbo's pitching buckskin.

Hatfield held his fire, knowing that Jarbo was unarmed and the least dangerous of the two. He raced forward, driving two more shots in the direction of the Ghost as the white Arab broke into a gallop, heading for the Flying J barns.

Buck Jarbo's horse panicked by the roll of gunshots, completely out of control. With the Flying J boss rocking in saddle, the buckskin charged off past the corner of the ranchhouse in mad stampede.

RACING after them, Hatfield saw the Ghost in Golden Armor vanish beyond the black-angled silhouette of the Flying J barn. Off to the left, Hatfield heard a crash of splintering wood and he whirled around.

Jarbo's buckskin, galloping in stampede,

had run bodily into the fence which made a barricade around the bear pit. Even as Hatfield watched, he saw the buckskin go down, hurling the Flying J outlaw through space.

A gasp of horror blew from the Texas Ranger's lips as he saw Jarbo vanish under the black rim of Senor Oso's cistern. Jarbo's screams blended with the savage roar of the penned bear down in the cistern as the buckskin regained its feet and went galloping across the mesa with stirrup leathers flapping.

Drawn to the bear pit by some force too great to resist, Hatfield scrambled through the broken fence and skidded to a halt at the edge of the old cistern. Down there, dimly seen in the moonlight, Jarbo and the Flying J mascot were locked in a death grapple, man wrestling beast.

Buck Jarbo, lacerated from chest to knees by the bear's long curved claws, sank to the stone floor of the pit as Jim Hatfield got his first glimpse of the horrific duel. Snarling hideously, Senor Oso's fanged jaws closed over the outlaw's throat, crunching bone, rending flesh.

Sick with revulsion, Hatfield lifted his six-guns, notched them on the bear's eye. The Colt .44s bucked and roared in the Ranger's fists, silencing the bear's ravening growls, leaving only the expiring gargled death-rattle of Buck Jarbo.

When the smoke cleared under the gentle evening breeze, Hatfield saw that his bullets had drilled the black bear through the eye, dropping it in a shaggy heap, quivering but lifeless.

But the shots had come too late to save the Flying J boss. Jarbo's corpse lay in the lethal embrace of the bear he had kept captive in such cruel fashion, in this abandoned cistern. Jarbo had suffered the very fate he had intended to mete out to Jim Hatfield three nights ago!

"Might as well leave yore carcass for the boys to find," the Ranger muttered, sending his whistle signal out to bring Goldy to him. "At last I've got my chance to run down the Ghost in Golden Armor."

His stomach knotted with nausea, Hatfield turned away from the gory scene as Goldy came trotting up in response to his whistle. Far off across the mesa, Hatfield saw the Ghost in Golden Armor hurtling eastward toward the Rafter Q, his white horse a blur in the spectral moonlight.

With a mile head-start, the Ghost would be difficult to catch, once he reached the *brasada*.

CHAPTER XVI

Dynamite Doom

QUENT Fremont, back in the Rafter Q's ruined bunkhouse—a roofless shell of a building since Jarbo's raid—rolled out of his bedroll in the gray light of the false dawn. He had moved out to the adobe enclosure in order to permit Donna to use her room in the main ranchhouse in spite of the absence of her father as chaperone.

She was already up when Fremont pumped a pan of water and washed up on the kitchen porch. He knew that Donna wanted to start the trip to Sallazzo as soon as it got daylight, so as to reach the side of her wounded father.

Fremont was in a morose mood as he surveyed his ruined ranch buildings in the half-light of early morning. His own crew, from Pablo Escobedo to his Mexican cook, had pulled stakes upon hearing that the mysterious Ghost in Golden Armor had driven their fellow countrymen away from the Haunted Lake project. To the Mexican *vaqueros*, the Ghost was a devil incarnate, putting a curse on the range around Lago Espantosa.

The young Rafter Q boss felt his spirits lift when he went into the kitchen. He found that Donna had prepared a breakfast of coffee and sowbelly strips, wheatcakes and sorghum mollasses, fried eggs and stewed peaches.

"I couldn't sleep, darling," she said. "Wondering how Dad's leg is knitting, wondering about Slim-Jim—I mean Mr. Hatfield. I can't get used to realizing that Slim-Jim is a Ranger. And such a famous Ranger as the Lone Wolf."

Quent Fremont attacked his breakfast with relish. For a city girl, Donna Weston knew how to cook for a rancher's taste.

"I feel guilty, lettin' Hatfield ride over to Flyin' J by himself," Fremont com-

mented, buttering his flapjacks. "He is noted for wantin' to work by himself—that's where he got his nickname of the Lone Wolf— But he should be back by now, if he didn't run into trouble at Jarbo's."

Donna poured herself a cup of coffee—she had already eaten breakfast—and stared out of the kitchen window at the broad expanse of the Rafter Q range, beginning to reveal itself in the ruddy light of the true sunrise.

"With Jarbo out of our way, we'll make a real ranch out of the Rafter Q, dear," she said. "It's what I've always wanted—to live out in this great free, wild country. We're going to be mighty happy, Quent."

Fremont smiled ruefully. "According to what Hatfield told us, yore dad has undergone a change of heart toward me, anyway."

She laid a hand on his arm.

"Daddy never actually disapproved of you, Quent," she assured him. "I'm all he has. Dad is a frustrated man. He so much wanted to head the department of archaeology at the University, you know, and he saw two foreigners come to America and crowd him out of that chair. Dr. Gosche and now Dr. Trevor."

Fremont slid back his chair and stood up.

"That reminds me, today's the day Trevor aims to blow up that dam and empty the lake. I wish he'd postpone that until yore father's leg heals up. I hate to think of yore dad bein' cheated of helpin' discover that Aztec treasure, after all the work he's put in diggin' that drainage ditch."

Donna started stacking the dishes.

"You go out and rope our horses, Quent," she urged him. "We'll be riding past Dr. Trevor's camp over at the Lake on our way to Sollazzo. If he has an ounce of human understanding in him, he'll ride over to visit Dad before he goes on with draining that Lake today."

Fremont took down a rawhide reata from a peg by the door and headed out into the cool morning to rope horses for their ride to Sollazzo. His cavvy had been free to stray over the mesa since Jarbo's attack, but they returned every morning and evening to the water tanks as a matter of habit.

Since Donna's favorite mount, the wiry little pinto, had been left over at Jarbo's ranch the night she and Hatfield made their escape riding double on Goldy, Fremont dabbed his twine on a leggy strawberry roan and saddled it for the girl. He selected a white-stockinged black for his own use.

A few minutes later they were cantering away from the ash-heaps which marked the Rafter Q spread, sparing their horses for the round trip they must make today.

ROUNDING a spur of encroaching chaparral they came in sight of Haunted Lake. The Mexican laborers had fled without taking their tents with them, so great had been their haste in obeying the ultimatum of the Ghost in Golden Armor.

The line of the drainage ditch slanted off to the north in the direction of the mesa rim and the Nueces bottom. All that kept the waters of Lago Espantosa from surging into that V-shaped trough across the sagebrush flats was a shell of earthen bank. Dr. Trevor had spent all of yesterday afternoon setting dynamite charges inside that natural dam.

"I'm surprised Trevor hasn't blown his explosives by now," Fremont commented, as they approached the army tent where the leader of the expedition was camping. "It might take all day for the lake to drain and expose the bottom."

Donna Weston laughed. "Wouldn't the Doc be flabbergasted if he doesn't locate the skeletons of that *conquistadore* mule train and all the Aztec treasure they were carrying? But I imagine it's there. Dr. Trevor spent half a lifetime studying old records over in Barcelona and Cadiz and Madrid. That's why he got his job with Alamo University, really—to explore Haunted Lake."

She sighed, a romantic thought striking her.

"Just think, Quent," she breathed, riding over close to his stirrup, "if Haunted Lake hadn't been located on your ranch, I would never have met you. I would have gone through life an old maid."

Fremont guffawed. "A pretty girl like you?" he retorted. "Yuh'd have married Charlie Cameron, probably, and settled down to—"

Seeing the look which came into the

girl's eyes, Fremont regretted his facetious reference to the martyred surveyor, buried now over in the Sollazzo Boot Hill alongside Hube Overmile, the Texas Ranger who had also been a victim of the Ghost in Golden Armor.

They were within twenty yards of Dr. Trevor's tent, now The scientist's mules were grazing down by the lake shore, mules employed by the expedition for hauling supplies from Sollazzo.

And there was another animal grazing with those mules. A white Arabian stallion, its flanks dripping pads of foam, its ribs heaving from a long fast ride, just completed.

"Quent!" screamed Donna, sighting the *blanco*. "That—that's the Ghost's horse! I'd know it anywhere!"

Fremont clamped his jaws grimly, reached for the walnut stock of the rolling-block Remington he carried in his saddle boot.

"Then the Ghost must be around somewhere to make shore Trevor doesn't blast out that dam! Ride back to the ranch, Donna—before yuh're picked off from ambush!"

Even as she started to rein around, her face blanched with dread, a man's shout issued from the closed tent where Dr. Trevor slept.

It was the Doctor's voice, shrill with horror:

"No—no! Don't shoot! I'll leave the lake and its accursed gold behind forever, if you spare me!"

Spang! The morning silence was shattered by the ear-jolting roar of a horse pistol. Gunsmoke billowed from the fly of the tent. Inside there was a choked-off scream, followed by the thump of a body striking a canvas cot.

Donna cried out as she saw Quent whip his rifle stock to his shoulder and trigger a slug into the tent. Then he was dismounting, running toward the rear of Trevor's tent, discarding his smoke-spewing rifle for a six-gun.

Even as the young rancher reached the back end of the tent, the front flies flew open and the Ghost in Golden Armor stepped out, the sunlight flashing dazzlingly off his gilded metal suit, the wind whipping his scarlet plume at helmet's top. In his right hand he carried one of Dr. Rudolph Gosche's antique horse pistols. In his left swung a .25-3000 Winchester game rifle which Donna recognized as the one owned by Dr. Trevor.

Donna's scream was cut short by the explosion of the phantom's flintlock pistol. In the act of spurring the strawberry roan, she felt the game little peg pony lurch to the impact of a leaden ball striking its neck, shattering the spine. Even as the horse slumped groundward, Donna leaped out of stirrups to avoid being pinned by the dead roan.

IN the rear of the scientist's tent, Quent Fremont spun about from his efforts to unlace the fly for a glimpse inside, horror going through him as he realized his quarry had fled outdoors. Donna was partially obscured by flying dust as she staggered away from the slain horse. Then she hurled her arms aloft as she saw the Ghost discard his empty horse-pistol and aim the .25-3000 rifle at her.

Quent Fremont caught sight of the Ghost in Golden Armor then, and realized that resistance now would mean sure death for the girl he loved. If he attempted to draw a bead on the *brasada* phantom, the armored killer could drop Donna!

Aware that she was unarmed, the Ghost swung the .25-3000 barrel around to cover Fremont. Speaking in the musical accents of ancient Castillian Spanish, the Ghost in Golden Armor spoke for the first time:

"*Manos altas!* Raise the hands, senor! I have just slain El Doctor Trevor, who dared molest the secret of Lago Espantosa. You and the senorita will die if you do not surrender."

Fremont threw aside his six-gun, a wild hope surging through him. Although this ghost had just confessed to killing Trevor inside the tent, it was possible that he might spare the two of them, if they offered no resistance.

"The rope on yonder *caballo*, senor!" continued the Ghost. "Tie up the *damosela, por favor.*"

Moving like a man in a nightmare, Fremont lurched over to the dead roan and unbuckled the lariat from the pommel. The Ghost in Golden Armor stalked forward, his rifle swinging between his two targets.

Stepping up behind Donna, Quent Fre-

mont slipped the noose over her head and pinioned her arms to her sides.

"Don't worry, honey!" he whispered, with an assurance he was far from feeling. "This Ghost is probably Buck Jarbo. Killing Doctor Trevor takes care of saving the water in Haunted Lake. I have a hunch he'll spare us, if we promise to leave Rafter Q forever."

Obeying the Ghost's slurred orders, couched in pure Castillian Spanish, in great contrast to the coarser Mexican Border lingo, Fremont trussed the girl's legs at knee and ankle, using the remainder of the rope to tie her arms at her sides.

"I've got a derringer in my chaps pocket," Fremont whispered. "If Jarbo lowers that rifle one instant, we'll see if that fancy armor is bullet-proof or not."

Having completed his job of tying up the girl, Fremont stepped to one side. The Ghost in Golden Armor stalked forward, circling the young couple.

"Oh, Quent, he's going to shoot you in cold blood!" Donna moaned. "I love you, Quent!"

Stepping up behind Fremont, the Ghost raised the Winchester and, before the rancher knew the blow was coming, smashed the barrel over the cowboy's skull.

Fremont slumped in his tracks, knocked cold by the treacherous blow.

A hoarse laugh issued from behind the Ghost's helmet visor. Shouldering the smoke-fuming rifle, the phanton in golden armor strode off past the tent, down to the water's edge where his white stallion was grazing.

Leading the Arabian back to where Donna stood helplessly alongside the fallen rancher, the phantom halted.

Leaning his rifle against the end gate of Dr. Trevor's buckboard wagon, parked alongside the tent, the Ghost in Golden Armor unbuckled a horsehair reata from his pommel. Shaking out a wide loop, he fitted it over Quent Fremont's legs and drew it tight.

Then, driving his shoulder against Donna Weston's back, the Ghost knocked her off her feet.

In a moment the Ghost had knotted the same lariat around her legs.

That done, the golden-clad phantom returned to the white stallion and swung into stirrups. He recovered Dr. Trevor's repeating rifle and dallied the end of the horsehair rope to his saddle-horn.

THE Ghost's purpose became clear, when he spurred the *blanco* stud off in the direction of Haunted Lake, dragging Donna Weston and the unconscious Fremont at rope's end. He did not urge the Arab into a gallop, so that neither of his prisoners were in danger as their bodies skidded side by side over the grassy flats.

Reaching the end of Haunted Lake, the Ghost reined the white horse in the direction of the drainage ditch. He sent the Arabian stallion down into the trough which Dr. Trevor's labor gangs had excavated, and up the far bank.

When Donna and Fremont had been dragged down into the pit of the V-shaped ditch, the Ghost loosened his dallies and tossed the rope in the drainage canal. Then he dismounted, unbuckled a saddlebag and took out a box of sulfur matches.

Donna stared at the Ghost through a touseled screen of blond hair, her body lying in the adobe bottom of the ditch alongside her unconscious fiancé's.

She saw the Ghost skid his way to the bottom of the canal and walk toward the shell of earth which dammed the waters of Lago Espantosa. Imbedded in the loose shale were the boxes of dynamite which Dr. Trevor had brought over from Sollazzo in weeks past.

Horror jelled Donna's veins as she saw the Ghost squat alongside the explosive charges and pick up a fuse which led to percussion caps inside a case of dynamite. Dr. Trevor had prepared those charges only yesterday, intending to dynamite the dam today. Now, Dr. Trevor's killer was carrying out his plans—but for a different purpose.

Donna moaned, gnashing her teeth together. She was thankful, now, that Quent was unconscious, would never know the form in which death would strike. For the Ghost in Golden Armor was striking a match, touching it to the wormlike fuse, squatting there until he saw the fuse start sputtering sparks.

Donna knew the truth now. Their captor was going to blast open the shallow dam and release the raging waters of Haunted Lake into the drainage ditch. In so doing he would drown Donna and Quent Fremont, bury their corpses under

tons of silt somewhere between here and the Nueces bottomlands!

CHAPTER XVII

The Ghost Unmasked

LEAVING the *brasada* jungle which shut off the Rafter Q from Jarbo's range, Jim Hatfield picked up the trail of the Ghost in Golden Armor shortly after sunrise. He had lost valuable time back in the forest of chaparral, due to Goldy's becoming lost in the bewildering maze of crisscrossing trails which longhorn steers had blazed through the brush in search of prickley pear and mesquite beans for forage.

Now, with daybreak at hand, the Lone Wolf had a clear trail to follow, recognizing the white Arabian's stallion's trail by its distinctive horseshoe pattern.

After leaving the *brasada*, the Ghost in Golden Armor had headed straight for the Rafter Q Ranch. A mile out from the burned ruins of Fremont's place, Hatfield veered to the north as he saw where the Ghost had altered direction.

"Headin' for Haunted Lake," Hatfield panted, urging Goldy into a long lope. "That means he's either attacked the Rafter Q already or is bypassin' Donna and Fremont."

Goldy was beginning to break stride, exhausted by the hard gait which Hatfield had called for, when the Ranger rounded the last bulwark of brush and caught sight of Haunted Lake sparkling on the mesa floor ahead. Coming in view of Dr. Trevor's tent, he saw a slain horse lying in the shadow of Trevor's buckboard wagon. Sunlight glinted on a puddle of fresh blood from a bullet-hole in the strawberry's neck.

"That's one of Fremont's saddle horses —and it's fresh dead!"

Alarm constricted the muscles of Jim Hatfield's throat as he tried to figure out what lay back of that slain horse. Then, swinging his gaze to the end of the drainage ditch, the Ranger saw the Ghost's white horse standing on the lake shore.

Loosening six-guns in holsters, the Texas Ranger reined Goldy in that direction. He could see no trace of the Ghost in Golden Armor. Possibly the phantom was resting in the shade of Dr. Trevor's ditch.

Hatfield sent Goldy galloping across the dew-wet grass at the lake's western edge. Something had been dragged along that grass, within the past few minutes. The path made a beeline toward the dam at the end of Trevor's drainage ditch.

At that instant, Hatfield caught sight of the Ghost in Golden Armor. The Phantom in the gilded metal suit was scrambling up over the crest of the dam, running toward the white horse as fast as he could manage in the heavy armor.

The Ghost seemed to be running from something, although Hatfield had his doubts that the Ghost had seen him approaching. If he had, the phantom would have remained out of sight in the ditch, ready to ambush him.

Clambering aboard the Arabian, the Ghost curveted the magnificent *blanco* about without casting a glance in Hatfield's direction. Then, spurring the Arab into a gallop, the Ghost headed due east along the lake bank.

Within the minute, Jim Hatfield had reached the dam, intending to cross it in pursuit of the fleeing Ghost. If this chase was to develop into a long-range duel on horseback, he could win.

It was Donna's piercing scream which caused Hatfield to draw rein on the far side of the dam. Jerking around in saddle he stared down into the drainage ditch. The girl, bound hand and foot, was lying in the bottom of the canal. Beside her was Quent Fremont, bleeding from a gash on the scalp.

"Slim-Jim — keep riding!" screamed Donna frantically. "The dynamite! The Ghost lit the fuses—you'll be blown to pieces!"

Hatfield cast a glance in the direction of the rising sun. A hundred yards away, the Ghost in Golden Armor was halting the white Arabian, well out of range of the coming explosion.

Hatfield made his gamble then. Spurring Goldy off the dam, the Ranger pulled his sorrel around hard and sent him skidding down the steep bank of the drainage ditch. He saw smoke fumes rising from the tiered boxes of dynamite which Dr. Jonas Trevor had buried inside the face of the dam. The fuse had already burned

out of sight into the buried portion spewing sparks from its insulated casing. To try and dig out the fuse and extinguish it might be only suicidal.

DRIVING Goldy down the ditch bottom, Hatfield swung low in stirrups to snatch up the loose end of the Ghost's drag rope. He whipped a fast dally around his saddle-horn and swung Goldy toward the east bank.

Even as the sorrel started dragging Donna and Fremont after him, the dynamite exploded.

The dam was blotted out in a geyser of earth and débris, a roar of sound numbing Hatfield's eardrums, the explosion seeming to split the earth to its core. On the heels of the terrific detonation came a following, ominous bass roar of sound. Through the smoke and dust and raining clods which had formed the earthen bulwark between lake and ditch there plunged a great, foaming crest of green water.

In an eye's flash the canal was brimming with racing water, sluicing out through the ten-foot-wide break in Trevor's dam. Even as Goldy reached solid ground at the lip of the drainage ditch, Hatfield felt the rush of waters overwhelm the bodies of Fremont and Donna Weston.

But the sturdy horsehair rope held, and Hatfield, looking behind him, shouted with triumph as he saw the muddy, drenched forms of Fremont and Donna come snaking over the edge of the ditch, safely out of reach of the flood.

The raging waters were plunging at racehorse speed down the mile-long, arrow-straight length of the drainage ditch. Spume geysered high in the air as the onrush of water smashed against boulders which had been too heavy for the Mexicans to dig out of the canal floor.

Haunted Lake was emptying its age-old waters through the ever-widening breach in the dam. The spot where Donna and Fremont had been left to die was now under ten feet of racing, silt-filled flood waters.

Hatfield leaped out of stirrups and drew his bowie knife. Sunlight flashed off the keen-honed blade as he sundered Donna's bonds, cut the noose from Fremont's armpits.

The young Rafter Q rancher was blinking himself back to consciousness as Donna leaped to his side, cradling his bloody scalp in her lap, her eyes flooding with tears of thanksgiving for their last-minute deliverance from the Ghost's grisly doom.

"You two will be all right now!" Hatfield shouted above the roar of the plunging waters draining out of Lago Espantosa. "I've got to take care of that so-called Ghost!"

Donna screamed after Hatfield as he leaped into saddle and headed Goldy into the morning sunrays:

"Slim-Jim, he's got a rifle!"

Fifty yards out on the lake bank, Jim Hatfield saw the Ghost in Golden Armor taking careful aim with his .25-3000. The rifle spat flame and a copper-jacketed slug whined past Hatfield's ear.

This was showdown, final and climactic. Undeterred by the fact that the Ghost's rifle bettered the range of his Colt .44s, the Lone Wolf bent low over Goldy's mane and kept the sorrel headed straight toward his adversary.

Three times, the Ghost in Golden Armor laid shots downwind in the direction of his oncoming foe. Then, his nerve breaking as each shot missed by a narrow margin, the Ghost flung the .25-3000 into the waters of the lake. Wheeling the white Arabian around, he turned tail and fled toward the east.

The *blanco*, powerful and fast as it was, was no match for Hatfield's unbeatable sorrel.

Overhauling the fleeing phantom with every stride, Goldy cut in behind the *blanco's* pounding hoofs, forcing the Ghost's mount toward the lake.

WITH a scant dozen feet separating them, the Ghost twisted in saddle and whipped up a horse pistol. The flintlock weapon roared, but the Ghost could not take careful aim through the clumsy visor slits of his gilded helmet.

His pistol emptied, the Ghost bellowed in terror as he saw Hatfield spur Goldy for a last burst of speed. Then, standing tall in the stirrups, the Texas Ranger launched himself through space, his shoulders striking the Ghost in mid-section. Off-balance because of his unwieldly armor, the phantom of the *brasada* cartwheeled out of saddle and hit the edge of

the lake with a muddy splash, Hatfield on top of him.

Standing in knee-deep water, the Ranger drew his Colt and reached down to haul the Ghost in Golden Armor to his feet. Water drained from joints in the killer's metal suit. The scarlet plume on his helmet was a wilted, muddy rag.

"Don't force my hand," panted the Ranger. "Take off that helmet and show yore face. This is trail's end for yore plans, Doctor Jonas Trevor!"

As he spoke, Hatfield used his free hand to seize the Ghost's helmet and jerk it off his head. Revealed in the pitiless glare of the Texas sun were the owlish, spectacled eyes and jutting spade beard of the West's most eminent archaeologist.

CHAPTER XVIII

Aztec Gold

IN the cool shade of Dr. Trevor's tent, Donna Weston and Quent Fremont sat on the scientist's cot, staring at the Texas Ranger and the arch-criminal in golden armor whom he had brought to bay.

"But of course it had to be Doc Trevor," Fremont was saying, fingering the turban of bandage which Donna had taken from the expedition's first-aid medical chest and wrapped around his bruised skull. "With Buck Jarbo a victim of his pet bear, it couldn't have been anyone else, when yuh come to think of it."

Hatfield, enjoying a cigarette, grinned in Trevor's direction. The exposed "phantom" crouched on a folding canvas stood in the open end of the tent, owlish eyes staring off across Haunted Lake. Although the dam had been exploded only an hour previously, more than half of the lake's gravelly bottom had been exposed by the receding waters.

Knowing he faced hangrope justice for all the crimes he had committed while masquerading as the Ghost in Golden Armor, Dr. Jonas Trevor seemed to be aware of nothing but the rapidly dropping water level of Lago Espantosa.

"I must confess, Donna"—Hatfield grinned apologetically—"that I had some suspicions of yore father. His hostile manner, the fact that he limped when he walked the day after I ricocheted a bullet off the Ghost's armored leg—"

Donna shook her head, puzzled.

"But why—why?" she demanded, still unable to believe that Dr. Trevor could be the man guilty for this six-year-long reign of terror in the Nueces country. "What was your purpose for this fiendish masquerade, Doctor?"

The Lone Wolf, wearing his Ranger badge in plain sight now that he had completed another assignment, studied the glowing tip of his cigarette for a moment. Then he answered Donna's question.

"I believe I'm right in believin' that the Aztec gold was the motive back of Dr. Trevor's career of crime," the Ranger said. "I don't believe Trevor ever aimed to make the Alamo University museum a gift of whatever treasure is in this lake. Am I right, Doctor? Yuh planned to take that gold back to Europe and spend the rest of yore life in comfort, didn't yuh—instead of turning that archaeological treasure over to the museum?"

Jonas Trevor swung around to face them. He was a completely crushed man, sitting there in his heavy Spanish armor, minus the plumed helmet. Behind his thick-rimmed glasses, his blue eyes glittered with hate and frustration.

"*Ja*," he admitted, betraying his Teutonic accent for the first time in Hatfield's hearing. "That gold would have made me a rich man. But to get it out of Texas, I had to make sure not one survivor of my scientific expedition remained alive, to betray me. I had planned to crate that treasure and ship it out of Texas by mule train, secretly. But not return to Germany—that would have been too dangerous. I had made plans to lose myself, forever, down in the Argentine. A man can do anything when he has enough gold."

Donna Weston picked up one of the jeweled Spanish horse pistols which the Ghost in Golden Armor had carried.

"These flintlock pistols belonged to Doctor Gosche, didn't they?" she said accusingly. "You killed Doctor Gosche, six years ago, didn't you?"

An arrogant smile twisted the lips above Trevor's square-cut ginger beard.

"*Ja*, so I did. Six years ago, Rudy Gosche established beyond doubt that this Haunted Lake was where the *con-*

quistadores had camped, that night when aboriginal Texas Indians massacred them. The gold of Montezuma which they carried, according to ancient documents which Gosche had discovered in Spanish archives, was dumped out in this lake. That was what I had been waiting for."

Flattered by the intense interest of his audience, Trevor warmed to his subject.

"When Doctor Gosche was positive of his facts," Trevor said, "I waited until we were out in the Navajadas, surveying the old routes of conquest. I killed Gosche and the others in our party, then reported their deaths to the law in Sollazzo. The Ghost in Golden Armor was an old Texas legend hereabouts, so I laid the blame for the disappearance of my colleagues on this phantom and his white horse."

TREVOR chuckled as he sorted over his fiendish reminiscences.

"No one ever found the glacial pothole where I threw the bodies of my victims," he said, "until young Charlie Cameron ran across those skeletons in what he called the Well of Bones. I knew Charlie was getting close to that spot. That is why I visited his camp the other night and stabbed him to death—as I supposed. It was quite a shock, I tell you, when Cameron came riding into camp with that antique dagger in his back."

Fremont shook his head somberly. "But the white horse—the golden armor—"

Trevor glanced down at his metal suit, then out through the tent fly to where Buck Jarbo's Arabian stallion was grazing.

"This armor?" repeated the scientist. "It came from the University museum of which I am the curator, of course. I painted an ordinary iron suit with gilt paint. It was handy, finding a snow-white stallion over in Cortez Basin. If the stallion's Flying J brand was discovered, what of it? Buck Jarbo would be suspected immediately. That was all right with me. I knew Jarbo was an outlaw with a bad record, and it was easy to slip the stallion out of his corral when I needed him. Jarbo never used him as a saddle horse."

Donna glanced from Hatfield to Trevor. "You haven't explained why you committed all these crimes disguised as a ghost of a long-dead Spaniard," she complained.

Trevor shrugged.

"Logical enough, my dear," taunted the archaeologist. "I knew the easiest way to get rid of my Mexican crew, when they had finished the drainage ditch project, was to prey on their superstition. That's why I took to riding around the Lake of moonlight nights—being careful to wait until I was through with my peons.

"Three Texas Rangers were sent to track me down. It was easy enough to get their confidence, lure them out into the Navajadas where I was supposed to be inspecting Cameron's survey, and dispose of them in the Well of Bones. The last Ranger, Hube Overmile, I tied to the saddle and sent back to Sollazzo. That was a mistake. It enraged the law to such an extent that they dispatched Jim Hatfield out here to solve the case. Which you have done commendably, Mr. Hatfield. I shall have reason to reflect on your skill and courage when I am waiting for the gallows trap to spring."

Trevor lapsed into silence, his attention once more on the draining bottom of the lake.

"Trevor decided to start gettin' rid of everyone connected with his treasure-hunt," Hatfield spoke up. "That was why he staked you out to that anthill, Quent, knowin' yuh would soon die, but also knowin' that search parties would find Donna before she starved to death. That would have scared Trevor's assistant, Professor Weston, out of the picture for good, and yore testimony, Donna, would have proved to the Mexicans that the Ghost in Golden Armor was around."

Fremont nodded slowly.

"I can understand now why Trevor rode over to Jarbo's ranch last night to kill my Flyin' J neighbor," he said. "That was because Trevor knew that Jarbo would be showin' up with a herd of cattle today, and would keep Trevor from goin' through with his scheme to drain the lake. Trevor had to put Jarbo out of the way."

"Yes," went on Donna Weston, "and that is why the Doctor put on his golden armor and frightened off his own Mexican crew. The ditch was dug and the Mexicans had outlived their usefulness. From

first to last, Doctor Trevor used diabolical cunning."

Hatfield crushed out his cigarette stub under heel.

"I didn't get wise to Trevor being the Ghost," he admitted, "until after I come back from my own ordeal with yore father, Donna, over at the Well of Bones. Jarbo burned out the Rafter Q at the same time that the Ghost was gettin' rid of Professor Weston and me over in the Navajadas—which was proof that Jarbo wasn't the Ghost. Trevor was the only suspect left who had a reason for wantin' to kill off everybody connected with the drainin' of Haunted Lake."

Trevor turned around to face them once more.

"That dope I slipped in the bottle of coffee which I gave Luke Weston took care of you two very handily," he chuckled. "After I heard that Weston and Hatfield had escaped, I was glad I hadn't lifted my visor and let you see my face, over at the Well of Bones. Your escape from that pit, Hatfield, was the most brilliant piece of work you accomplished in bringing me to bay."

DONNA turned to Quent Fremont and smiled.

"Do you feel like riding over to Sollazzo, darling?" she asked. "I want to tell Dad the news. After all, he will now achieve his lifelong ambition. He will get the credit for bringing back the Aztec treasure to the University. With Dr. Trevor gone, he will become head of the archaeology department at Alamo U."

Fremont got to his feet.

"We might as well get headed for Sollazzo, Hatfield," he suggested. "As soon as Donna has seen her father, I'm going to rustle her over to a *padre*. I—I'd like to have you act as best man at our weddin', Jim. If it hadn't been for you, Donna and I wouldn't even be alive today."

Hatfield stepped out into the blinding sunshine and whistled for his sorrel.

"I'll turn you over to the sheriff in Sollazzo, I reckon," the Ranger told Dr. Jonas Trevor. "Just for luck, yuh can ride the white Arabian over to Otie Jennings' Ranger Station. I want him to see that this Ghost in Golden Armor case is really finished—except for yore trial and conviction."

Jonas Trevor stepped out of the tent, his eyes still fixed on the glistening naked gravel of the lake bed. Except for a few isolated puddles marking deeper spots in its bottom, the Haunted Lake was completely emptied.

"Montezuma's treasure!" the erstwhile Ghost shouted suddenly, pointing off to the east. "It's there—just as Doctor Gosche said it would be! Waiting there for over four hundred years!"

Hatfield stared in the direction Trevor was pointing. Fifty yards off shore he saw a series of moss-covered, muddy objects which the draining waters had brought into view.

Even at this distance, he recognized those shapes as the skeletons of Spanish mules, each with an old-fashioned hardwood X-shaped pack-saddle. And those pack-saddles were laden with slime-encrusted leather *alfarjo* bags.

With an inhuman cry, Dr. Trevor set off down the grassy slope, his metal-clad feet splashing into the shallow puddles at the lake's edge.

Quent Fremont reached for a rifle leaning against the scientists's field desk, but Jim Hatfield shook his head.

"Trevor's doomed to stretch hangrope in a few weeks," said the Lone Wolf. "Let him have the sorry reward of seein' the gold that cost him his life. His whole life has been pointed toward recovering that treasure. Apparently he didn't realize that Montezuma and his Aztecs put a curse on the loot which Coronado took out of Mexico."

Donna Weston stared after the Ghost in Golden Armor, as Trevor slogged his way across the muddy gravel bottom of Haunted Lake.

"I hope he won't get away," she said anxiously.

Hatfield shook his head.

"He couldn't go far in that heavy armor. I'll go out and check on that Aztec treasure, myself. It might turn out to be just another legend, in spite of Doctor Trevor's years of research."

Donna and Quent Fremont remained on the bank as Jim Hatfield set off across the muddy bottom of the lake, following Trevor.

Heading in a bee-line for the moldering remains of the Spanish mule train, screaming unintelligibly in German as he

stumbled and picked himself up to race on and on toward the goal of his frustrated ambitions, Jonas Trevor did not try to avoid what appeared to be a mud puddle between him and the Aztec loot.

Straight across the mud puddle the armor-clad scientist stumbled his way—suddenly to vanish from sight in a geysering splash of murky water.

A yell escaped Jim Hatfield's lips as he broke into a run. Donna and Quent saw the Texas Ranger skid to a halt on the edge of the sheet of water.

IT was no mud puddle into which Trevor's berserk, blind sprint had carried him. It was a deep, rock-bottom pool which was below the surface of the lake, and therefore not emptied by the drainage ditch.

Ten feet below the glittering surface of the pool, Jim Hatfield saw the wildly threshing body of Dr. Jonas Trevor, struggling helplessly on the bottom, weighted down by the gilded armor which prevented him from rising to the surface. Chains of bubbles broke from Trevor's jerking mouth and tugged up through the disturbed water to explode on the surface.

As Hatfield stared, unable to help the drowning killer, he saw the last bit of air leave Trevor's lungs and bubble upward. The armor-clad body went still, appearing to move only because of the aberrations of the intervening ten feet of gelid water.

Trevor was a victim of his own golden armor.

Hatfield stood there a moment, contemplating the vagaries of destiny, the grisly justice which the Fates had meted out to the Ghost in Golden Armor today, here not ten feet away from the goal of his lifelong dreams and strivings.

Casting a last look at the waterlogged corpse in the bottom of the pool, Hatfield circled the edge of the water.

He stood for a moment looking over the mule skeletons which told their mute story of Indian massacre, four centuries before.

He reached down to tug at the flap of a pack-bag. The rotten leather split like soggy cardboard under his grasp, and out of the pouch rolled a glittering treasure—turquoise-hilted Aztec daggers, golden objects of art untarnished by the years of immersion. Those priceless antiquities of an extinct civilization, Professor Luke Weston would be cataloguing in the museum laboratory of Alamo University in the weeks to come.

Selecting a golden image of the feathered sun-god which Montezuma had once worshipped in his Spanish-pillaged Aztec kingdom, Jim Hatfield started back across the lake bottom to where Goldy and Donna Weston and Quentin Fremont were waiting.

Surely the University could spare one golden bauble as a wedding present for the young couple who stood there on the threshold of their lives together on Rafter Q. It would make an interesting story to tell Roaring Bill McDowell when the Lone Wolf returned to Ranger headquarters for another assignment, too.

When renegades raid the Pie Ranch, the Lone Wolf Ranger tackles the dangerous trail of the forty rustlers in SECRET OF THE CENTRAL HILLS, a smashing complete novel featuring Jim Hatfield at his fighting best—next issue!

"I serenaded one of the pretty gals, and two fellers objected"

Fiddle-playin'
Prim Holston charms wolves
and desperadoes into the range
of his roaring six-guns!

A Ranger Breaks In

PRIM HOLSTON was the son of Cubley Holston who had developed a maverick calf into the Fishgrain Brand outfit and now ran more than 2000 cows on the Tangled Washes Hills. Fishgrain Cubley wasn't proud of his son.

Somehow, that boy just seemed to grow up missing fire. Prim learned to ride, hanging to the backs of big calves; he found a .22-caliber, single-shot pistol on the Cedar Brakes trail when he was seven years old but nobody knew he could shoot it from either hand and hit a jackrabbit running. One thing everybody did know —Prim could play all the tunes he ever heard on blow-harps. Also, he picked a banjo, sawed a fiddle; and no Mexican ever played a guitar with more feeling than Prim Holston. Moreover, he was a singer from away back yonder!

By HIRAM VERMONT

In all Texas, from the Llano River to the Rio Grande, native sons just naturally had to look anybody square in the eye and back down for nobody. And here was Fishgrain Holston knowing that his own son ran to music and was laughed at because he slicked out of standing up for his rights and his honor. The whisper ran the rounds that Prim Holston just lacked in the one essential of a he-man—nerve.

The notion started in school in Mirage City, so-called because all the structures seemed to be founded on a shimmering spread of lake. The Fishgrain Brand outfit was away over south of town right in the edge of the Tangled Washes. Prim boarded in town during the school terms, from the time he was eight years old on into fifteen years. He never once showed he was able to take care of himself against the town boys. All he did was keep out of the way of the bullies.

When Prim was no more than twelve years old, he was playing fiddle music for the Caprice Entertainments, Bull Timpkin's dance hall, saloon and green room. Timpkin paid him good wages for Friday, Saturday and Sunday night music. When Prim was fifteen he was wearing a horsehide money belt that held more cash than he could reasonably spend. Of course, he never bragged about his thrift, industry and musician's status back home on the ranch. He was paid twice as much for music as for riding.

DURING the school vacations Old Fishgrain Cubley put the boy to work, riding. Prim didn't take to being a cowboy, specially. Out in the Tangled Washes Cubley had seven small cabins where his riders stopped over when it was too far to go to spend nights at the ranch. Prim sneaked a fiddle out to his favorite cabin at Noisy Springs, and when he was on hunting duties, he'd spend a lot of time making music instead of making wolves and cougars scarce. At the same time, using his short-barreled carbine .38-55, Prim brought in enough wolf hides and occasional big cat skins to show he was tending reasonably to business.

Cubley approved of Prim's industry, and one night when his curiosity had been aroused, he went out to the springs cabin, unexpectedly. Half a mile from the cabin, Cubley heard wolves wailing. He came in closer and heard music, fiddling, the steplively tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me"!

Fishgrain Cubley Holston wasn't superstitious, but he knew there were places that people avoided at certain times and on occasions because of inexplicables. And the Tangled Washes country was talked about. The rancher would have turned around and gone somewhere else, but this was where his boy Prim was hanging out, and Cubley Holston was the last man in West Texas to leave his boy to the miseries of haunts. He tied his horse and sneaked along the trail to the cabin.

And there sat Prim Holston on a four-legged stool, with a fiddle under his chin and sawing away for further calls of dance figures—

Oh, swing that gal behind yo'!

Sitting in front of him, howling, were eight or ten red wolves. Cubley remembered that in his younger days when he'd gone to dances, wolves had come around and howled to the music. But here was the first Cubley Holston knew fiddlers played just to entertain the critters!

This fiddler was Prim Holston, his own son! Fishgrain Holston hadn't even known his boy was a fiddler, and fit to be champion at that! He recalled Prim had had a spell of blow-harping, like lots of boys along in the early teens. Now and again he'd heared Prim was serenading a girl, but boys were like that, anyhow.

Of course, the rancher thought this charming of the wolf pack explained how come Prim brought in more wolf hides than any two cowboys on the outfit. He backed away silently, returned to his horse, and waited. Any minute the boy would open up with that .38-55 and pick off two or three wolves. But there was no shot, only the fiddling and the mourning yowling.

Cubley rode back down the hills and arrived at the outfit just when the riders were emerging from breakfast, ready to go to work. He nodded, but said not a word, and from the looks of his face, all hands realized he wasn't good-natured.

He took to riding with first one and then another cowboy, talk would spring up—then he'd ask about Prim. They all

knew things about the boy. He was the best fiddler and blow-harper and guitar player in all Texas. The cowboys were willing to bet even their short-guns on that! He never killed half as many wolves as he could have—only just enough to keep down suspicions that he had soft-spots in him. All the riders thought Prim was sentimental, and kind of soft, never having known a musical man who wasn't a bit off thataway. They said the girls liked him—which might or might not be a good sign.

Pride and hope surged in Prim's favor. Fishgrain Cubley found it difficult to acknowledge that his son might be less than he should have been. Come to learn the facts, Prim had made more fiddling in town than lots of cowboys earned. The idea of his son being a paid musician was tough on Cubley Holston's feelings. He'd paid Prim good—wages and allowance for his work on the ranch. Nevertheless, suppose the boy should take the notion to ride away and roam, vagabonding up and down the land, playing music? He might even go on the stage! . . .

Captain Dubois of the Llano Ranger camp was an old friend of Fishgrain Cubley. They had ridden together as boys, had hell-whooping in the cavalry of the Rebel Armies and been with N. B. Forest's raiders. Naturally, Cubley Holston went to Captain Dubois with his problem of an unworthy, fiddling son.

Captain Dubois knew all about Prim, though he'd never mentioned that delicate matter to his friend. It just was one of those inexplicable happen-sos. By good rights, Prim ought to have been the toughest, wildest, most independent rough rider up and down all West Texas. Instead, he ran to harmony, melody and kindness.

"Cap'n, cain't yo' take that boy—make a *man* of him?" Holston asked, point-blank. "For old times' sake?"

Captain Dubois was set back at the idea of Prim Holston as a Texas Ranger! And then Cubley apologized.

"'Course, not as a Ranger!" Holston added. "I mean jus' figure something out we can do for him."

YES, sir, Holston understood. He could see Prim couldn't actually be a Ranger; but he could be tried out. Sheriff Bud Rucker was a good man even if he was just around home folks and seldom crossed a county line, while a Ranger roamed from Indian Territory to Mexico, from Louisiana to New Mexico—1500 miles or so as the traces meandered.

"I tell yo', Cubley," the Ranger captain said, "let's me'n yo' go see Bud Rucker—we know Bud—we rode with him! He never had no wild and woolly rampageous idees. In fact, he's content to play local, county politics. Let's ask Bud fo' a favor."

Sheriff Bud Rucker was leaning back in his swivel arm chair, his heels up on the desk in his county-court office when the Ranger and rancher horned in on him. His spur like to have throwed him, hooking in the wood when he rose to welcome his old soldier mates, and he came up with a two-quart flat brown bottle in one hand and a reasonable glass in another. So they sat down, and mellowed, discussed and finally got to the point.

"Yo' see, Sher'f, Cubley, heah, wants his boy Prim to have serious viewpoints, as regards public duties!" the Ranger said. "Yo' was the best danged trainin' lieutenant Old N.B. eveh had!"

The sheriff sighed. A man can't get along without friends, but sometimes they are the most unreasonable, disconcerting, botherating scoundrels a man can know, worse'n actually gun-coming bad friends.

"Prim Holston one of my deputies?" Rucker inquired. "Well, of course, I neveh in this world would have thought of him as such. But—um-m—'course, I'll try him. Yas, suh, I wouldn't be s'prised if'n he wouldn't jus' naturally fiddle our Border outlaws into a circle sittin' around him, howlin' and charmed."

The Ranger and the rancher realized, then, that they hadn't put anything over on their old friend, the politician and sheriff. They practically owed him an apology, wishing Prim Holston in as deputy sheriff. But it was true, Rucker had been N. B. Forest's best trainer and disciplinarian.

Accordingly, Prim was fiddling a special night's program in the Caprice Entertainments for Bull Timpkin, when he received a note painfully written on sheriff department note paper. It read:

Dear Prim Holston: I shore would take it kindly ifn you-un drapt in to my office come

before yo leave town. True-fer-certain

Bud Rucker
Sheriff.

In all his borned days, Prim Holston never had received official attention before. In fact, he had circled around any potential contacts with city marshals, deputies, Rangers—all those kinds. Now he swallowed, wondering what for Sheriff Rucker wanted him?

He got his horse from the livery barn and swung his fiddle box over his shoulder by a braided horsehair sling. He walked into the sheriff's office and stood there, the door closed behind him. The sheriff was sitting at his mahogany desk, that had nothing on it but an inkwell, a pen sticking up out of a bowl full of No. 6 lead shot, and a prancing horse revolver he'd taken apart for oiling and reloading with bright new brass shells.

"Somebody handed me a sher'f office note paper," Prim said, uneasily. "It was signed by somebody in yo'r name. Hyar 'tis! Mebbe it's just one of those dance hall jokes, suh."

"No, Prim," the sheriff said, shaking his head. "I wrote it myse'f. All there is to it— We got kind of a bad proposition down to'd the Rio Grande Riveh. Theh's mean fellers, a reg'lar gang, makin' trouble. We don't know 'zactly who 'tis—but they're runnin' horses, cows, an' raidin' stores—livin' on otheh men's properties. Likely you noticed they killed Stephen Ustown in the Bresh. Then they be'n abusin' famblies of Mexicans. You play a fiddle real good. I want you to go down theh, playing music. You'll be my dep'ty sher'f, all legal, but 'tain't a good idee showin' no badge, nor braggin' the appointment."

"Why—why—Sher'f!" Prim Holston gasped, "I neveh thought—neveh hoped I'd be legalized—a dep'ty sher'f!"

"Well, yo' be!" the sheriff remarked, handing up badge and credential paper.

"Why—thank'ee, Sheriff Rucker!" Prim Holston stood, shoulders squaring back. "I'm honored! I neveh thought—thought I'd get to be a dep'ty sher'f!"

"Thah's genuine duties go with the job, Prim," the sheriff added. "I've noticed a man playin' a fiddle never needs to explain his business. Three dep'ties and a Texas Ranger neveh come back from the Bresh. Nobody but me an' yo' know yo're a dep'ty. All yo' got to do is jes' find out."

"Just find out? Ain't I a whole-hog deputy, Sher'f?" Prim asked, and in his voice was a let-down of spirits.

"Boy, yo' got all the powers of the sher'f department!" the sheriff assured him. "Yo' couldn't ride a mile through that Bresh land if they knowed yo' was a dep'ty—bush whackers!"

"Well—why— All right, Sher'f!" Prim said, and the sheriff watched him go to the tie-rail along the court house square, mount, pull around and head down the old Bresh trail. The sheriff shook his head. Old Fishgrain Holston never would forgive him—not if Prim didn't come back.

CAPTAIN DUBOIS was in town two days later. He stopped in to "howdy" the sheriff. Rucker told about Prim—how the boy had taken it—held his badge and appointment as if he couldn't believe they were real. The Ranger nodded. He knew how those sentimentalists were about serving the public. They could be the most foolishest men that ever upheld the Lone Star or even the honor of a department.

After spending the night rehearsing old times with Sheriff Rucker, Captain Dubois headed south into the Bresh. In all the land that great thicket was the most problematical, jungle broken by cloudburst washes, here and there a little cabin and little chaps herding goats. And then there were ranches, cross-roads stores—little dots of population in an enormous wilderness.

The wind had blown away Prim Holston's tracks, and wherever Captain Dubois stopped in for a snack and asked a question, nobody admitted having seen a man riding by with a fiddle over his back, nor even of having heard music flowing by, loud and pretty in the dry dark. Captain Dubois knew if a Ranger was looking for a man, it would serve to protect that man from suspicion of being honest and respectable. If a fugitive minded his own business, the Bresh was safety for killer, thief or scoundrel. A fiddle was a good disguise.

Then one night when Captain Dubois was alone in an abandoned stone shack, he heard music, fiddling, coming out of the south through the Bresh. And he

heard a yip and a lifting howl in the gloom —red wolves mourning the shivery tunes in the sparkling dark! After a time a human voice raised in lonely song.

"Anyhow, he's alive!" Captain Dubois told himself. "Figures he'd better get out of this country—and he'd better! I'll just ride along with him!"

So he saddled his horse and cut over to the trace leading to the north. While he sat back in the tall shrubs the music grew louder, and then Dubois saw moving shadows. It was not a single horseman, but a regular train, six or eight horses, and the last of the animals was ridden by the fiddler. Captain Dubois wasn't looking at him but at the animals leading along on a rope, seven on them. The man up at the head had his elbows tied back and his ankles lashed under the belly of his long-backed horse.

Between the tied man and the fiddler were five horses, two with ordinary packs, three with men hung cross-wise over the saddles by their belts tied to the horns. Just opposite Captain Dubois, the tune came to an end, and the fiddler tightened a key. As he started to chin his fiddle, Captain Dubois hailed him.

"Howdy, Prim!"

On the instant the fiddler drew a short gun, of which he had two on his belt and three or four hung to his saddle horn.

Captain Dubois added, "I'm a Ranger, Prim—Cap'n Dubois!"

"Just show yo'se'f—plain!" Prim said, and the Ranger recognized the good sense in that. He rode out into the clear and his hands were up, out, in plain sight.

"Howdy, Cap'n!" Prim greeted.

Captain Dubois swung alongside. "Looks like yo' be'n busy, Dep'ty?" he said.

"Sher'f Rucker told yo'? I'm sho' proud, Cap'n."

"What happened?"

"I was playin' to a dance," Deputy Sheriff Holston answered. "I fiddled some, an' between times I picked a guitar. Made quite a hit. I serenaded one of the pretty gals, tall, blue-eyed. She took the compliment, an' 'course, two fellers objected. We had a fuss. I'd heard who to plague. We finished the dance, an' now I'm hurryin' home to town. These fellers I got won't keep, not even in cool weather like this."

"Why didn't you plant 'em down theh?" Dubois asked.

"Well, I don't reckon Rucker'd believe it, if'n I didn't bring 'em in." Prim shook his head. "Fiddlers ain't much account."

"But you took their guns, Prim."

"Tha's so! I neveh thought," the deputy admitted. "They didn't know I could shoot—bein' a fiddler."

Captain Dubois figured what had happened. Desperadoes had mistaken a fiddler for somebody easy and soft. When he'd made up to one of those hidden cabin girls, they'd begun a fuss and Prim Holston had promptly finished it. There he was, taking to town those badly wanted desperadoes. Prim knew the only report anyone'd believe was the sight of the men he'd taken care of—three dead ones and the one who rode at the head of the packtrain.

THE Ranger captain was nonplussed. It takes a lot to flabbergast a Ranger who has lived his way up to being captain. Riding along that train through the Bresh country, looking at the proofs of Prim Holston's law-officer prowess, it just didn't seem likely, or even possible. Out of respect for the captain, Prim had loosened up his fiddle strings and swung the box over his shoulder, but there it was, and Dubois could hear it bump-bump-bump as the horse jogged along.

"I mout of knowed a son of old Fishgrain Holston'd be good, down under his music!" Captain Dubois sighed. "Well, live'n learn!"

So the three of them, the tied-up outlaw, the Ranger captain and the fiddling deputy sheriff, Prim Holston, rode into Mirage City out of that bad Bresh country. This was Monday afternoon, trading day, and people were in from all over—in wagons, buckboards, on horseback, leading packers—but this loaded train coming in was the most surprising ever. Captain Dubois hung back, giving Prim the full credit.

Fishgrain Holston had come in, riding a big Arabian, and the Fishgrain cook had driven in a five-horse team for supplies. He was standing on the cross-roads corner, whittling, talking with Sheriff Rucker. No word had come from Deputy Sheriff Prim Holston. And there came Captain Dubois, shacking in as if all by himself, and Rucker glared at him. The Ran-

ger winked, but the rancher didn't see that.

Then up out of the south came that pack train, with a shamed looking scoundrel tied up in the lead and those six other animals, the last one toting Prim Holston who looked embarrassed, modest and as if he didn't know how to act, officially. Three dead men, one live prisoner, two pack-loads of recovered loot and three of the horses wearing stolen brands!

The jaws of Sheriff Rucker parted; Fishgrain Cubley Holston plucked at his beard, staring in surprise at those dangling gun-holsters and that fiddle box.

"If'n yo' don't mind, Cubley, I'd like to have your boy riding Ranger for our Llano squad," Captain Dubois remarked, adding, "Now't he's broke in at law-enforcing!"

"You—you—" The old rancher turned on his Ranger friend. "What've yo'n that danged Sher'f Rucker done to my boy?"

"We ain't done nothin'," Captain Dubois declared. "The kid just done the whole business hisse'f."

"What—*shootin'?*" the father demanded.

"Shootin'," the Ranger answered flatly.

"But—but all he done was blow, pick and fiddle!" the rancher exclaimed.

"An' bring in red wolves he'd enchanted," Ranger Captain Dubois reminded him. "Well, now't he's qualified, he'll make a good Ranger."

"That's so—that's right." Fishgrain Holston nodded. "I neveh give'm credit for them. A Ranger—shu-u! My boy Prim!"

"Reckon we all of us overlooked ev'ything but yo' boy Prim's music," the Ranger confessed. "We neveh counted the wolves and snakes he practised on."

"I reckon—I reckon!" the rancher agreed with a sigh. "My boy— 'Course, he fiddles— Well, darn kids! They all got some bad habit. Same as me, Cap'n! My pap worried his haid off about me an' my banjo picking. I was sure good at it. If'n it hadn't be'n for ouh Civil War ruckus I don't know but I'd be'n a musician myse'f. Anyhow, ridin' with Old N.B., an' a musket ball tearin' up my banjo, I kind-a got out the notion."

Roundup of Western Facts

WHEN early settlers sank their first wells in Texas they frequently hit underwater streams and would occasionally haul up a fish in their bucket of water. Even one hundred years ago there were several wells around Brazoria and Galveston counties where the "young uns" would sink a fish line and fetch up something for dinner.

EVERYONE has heard of "Buffalo Bill" Cody, but not everyone realizes that the "buffalo" in his nickname is a misnomer. Buffalo Bill never shot a buffalo in his life. There are no such animals on the North American Continent. The animals that Cody shot as a meat hunter for the army and the railroads, were North American bisons. Buffalo occur in Africa and Asia.

SKIS are seldom mentioned in stories about the West, but the fact is they were commonly used by cowboys. When the telegraph lines began to spread across the country, the incoming lumberjacks and linemen brought skis with them for the job of patrolling the lines. The skis were promptly adopted by the cowboy and thereafter became quite popular in the West.

THE West has never rivalled Africa as a diamond producer, but there was a famous "diamond" which played one of the greatest roles in Frontier development. This was the diamond hitch—or, in other words, the system of knotting rope so as to tie a pack on a mule or horse's back. A continuous line of about thirty feet was laced about the load and about the animal that bore it to form a diamond-shaped pattern on top.

—Rex Sherrick.

Lawman Needed

By TEX MUMFORD

Young Brad Martin rides clear into a storm center of trouble!

Martin reached out to drag Craddock from the saddle

THE heat in the canyon was stifling, for the towering rock walls blocked off any breeze there might have been. Brad Martin, feeling that heat pressing in on him, halted his horse beneath an overhanging ledge and swung stiffly out of saddle. But he was not thinking of his own discomfort. He did not even hear the jingle of his spurs as he walked over to a still figure sprawled face downward beside a big boulder.

"Drygulched," he muttered tightly. He saw the bullet-hole in the left side of the dead man's back. "High-powered rifle, looks like."

His gaze was grim and thoughtful as he looked around. He was a big young man who looked salty, and his range clothes had seen a lot of use. Not until then did he lean down and turn the corpse over. He frowned, looked grimmer. He recognized that dead man.

"Ed Vare," he mumbled. "A stranger in these parts just as I am. Now why would anybody want to down him?" Then a thought struck him. "Unless—"

Abruptly the sound of a horse's hoofs came to him and he looked up. The clatter on the hard surface of the canyon floor grew louder. Left hand on the gun in the holster on his left hip, Brad waited.

From around an outcropping a rider appeared. A big black bearded man on a powerful bay horse. He rode closer, his glowering gaze fixed on Brad Martin and the dead man. Martin watched warily. He had never seen this bearded man before in his life. And long ago Martin had found it good policy to be cautious with all strangers.

The man in the saddle reined the bay close to where Martin stood and finally spoke.

"I'm Lem Craddock," he informed, and he said it as though the mere mention of his name ought to be enough for anyone. "What's happened here, stranger?"

"Looks like somebody drygulched this hombre." Martin shrugged. "I was ridin' through the canyon, saw this jasper on the ground and stopped to see if there was anything I could do for him. There wasn't. My name's Brad Martin!"

"Know him?" Craddock demanded curtly, his gaze on the face of the dead man. "Stranger to me."

"To me, too," Martin lied deliberately. He had not missed the carbine in Craddock's saddle-boot. "But I wouldn't be likely to. I don't belong hereabouts. Just ridin' through."

"That's one way to be safe—just keep

on riding." If Craddock meant that for a threat his tone was casual enough. "Some folks around here don't like strangers."

"You one of 'em?" Martin asked quietly.

FOR a moment the gaze of the two men met and held. Martin believed he had never seen colder eyes than those of this Lem Craddock, but he did not allow the bearded man to stare him down. It was Craddock who finally shrugged and looked away.

"With me it depends on the stranger," was all he said.

He swung out of saddle, dropping the reins and ground-hitching the bay. Kneeling beside the dead man he made a swift examination.

He looked up and motioned Martin over to him.

"Rather have yuh where I can see yuh," he said coldly. "I don't aim to take a chance on gettin' shot in the back like this hombre has been."

"I couldn't do it like that," drawled Martin. He moved over to the man. "I'm not carryin' a rifle."

Craddock grunted and began going through the dead man's pockets. He drew out a roll of bills and some small change, put the find back.

In another pocket he found a badge, and gave a low whistle.

"U. S. Deputy Marshal," he said slowly. "So that's what he was, huh?"

"It would seem so," agreed young Martin. "He might not have been killed if his drygulchers hadn't thought—or known—he was a lawman." He looked at Craddock intently. "Folks around here, you say don't care much for strangers. Does that go for the Law, too?"

"There's been some rustlin', and a couple of stage holdups in this region lately," acknowledged Craddock. He was still searching the dead man's pockets. He drew out a crumpled letter. "Seems this hombre had the name of Ed Vare, according to the address on this."

"Ed Vare," Martin said musingly. "Now where have I heard that name before?"

Craddock glanced over the few pencil scrawled lines, and passed the note over to the young rider.

"Take a look at that," he said, and Brad Martin read:

Dear Ed,

Here's the hundred—I'll pay you—the other four hundred when you finish the job—but get him, and no slip-up.

The bearded man looked up.

"It ain't signed. Funny kind of a letter for a U. S. Marshal to be carryin'."

"Mebbe not," Martin said thoughtfully. "I've heard some lawmen are nothin' but bounty hunters. Mebbe this Vare was one of 'em."

Lem Craddock stood up. He drew a clean white handkerchief out of a pocket of his levis and mopped his face.

"I'll report to the sheriff about findin' this jasper when I get to town," he said crisply.

But the words were no more than out of his mouth when, from some boulders at the south end of the canyon, came the whiplike sound of a rifle echoing and re-echoing against the cliffs. An invisible hand seemed to tug at the loose vest Brad Martin wore as a bullet came dangerously close. Instantly he dropped to the ground as his gun appeared in his hand. Craddock was still standing, scowling in the direction from which the shot had come.

"Get down, yuh idiot!" Martin shouted. "He ain't goin' to miss the next time!"

Craddock gave him just one look, then coolly walked over to his horse and drew his carbine out of the saddle-boot. Placing the short-barreled rifle to his shoulder he blasted away at the boulders where the drygulcher apparently was located. Calmly he lowered his gun.

"We won't be bothered by him again," he remarked casually. "He won't be stickin' around—now he knows I've got a rifle, too."

The drygulcher made no attempt to shoot back at Craddock, even though the big man had presented an excellent target. That, thought Martin, was interesting. Craddock's wild shooting at the boulders hadn't been anything to put fear into a hidden man, either.

"I hope yuh're right," said Martin. He seemed a little nervous as he got quickly to his feet. "All the same I'm gettin' out of here, pronto."

HE LEAPED to his horse and swung into saddle. Wheeling the roan he rode swiftly away, heading for the entrance of the canyon. Once he glanced

back over his shoulder. The bearded man had raised the carbine, then lowered it.

"It ain't loaded, Craddock," Martin mumbled to himself. "I figgered it wouldn't be after all that shootin' yuh just did."

And one other little matter was clear in Brad Martin's mind. That drygulcher had not fired at him until after Craddock had mopped his face with a white handkerchief—and the bearded man had been wearing a red bandanna around his neck that would have served that purpose just as well. That white handkerchief had been a signal to the drygulcher!

"Since I aim to live long enough to learn what's goin' on around here," Martin told himself wryly, "departure seems the better part of valor, as the feller says."

Two hours later he rode into a little cowtown called Eagle Rock, five miles west of the canyon where he had found the dead marshal. He left his roan to be taken care of at the livery stable, then drifted around town, doing some talking, but far more listening.

It did not take much probing to find out that a small but decidedly efficient band of outlaws had been busy for fifty miles around. Twice the Overland stage had been held up by five masked men, the passengers robbed, and the express box stolen. All four of the good-sized cattle ranches in Clearwater County had been losing stock.

Lem Craddock owned one of those ranches—the L Bar C outfit over east of town. His was the largest, and he had figured this a good reason for him to rule the roost to a great extent.

"Craddock has been losin' cattle," the bartender in the Majestic Saloon informed Martin. He was fat, bald and garrulous, eager to talk to this stranger at the bar, since there were no other customers. "Lem—he's plumb disgusted with the way Sheriff Tilford has been handling things. Can't say as I blame him much."

"Yuh mean the sheriff can't catch the rustlers?" asked Martin. "That it, Flynn?"

"Shore." Flynn nodded. "Most folks think Matt Tilford couldn't catch his pants if his belt broke. What we need is a real lawman around here."

"Uh-huh," agreed Martin. He was remembering the dead man in the canyon. "Mebbe a good U. S. deputy marshal to clean things up, huh?

"That would shore be fine," commented Flynn. "Have another drink?"

Martin declined. He talked casually for a few minutes more and left the saloon. From there he went to the local bank and talked to the banker about buying a ranch.

"Might have something," said the banker. "We're holding mortgages on a couple of ranches around here. How much do you think you could pay, Mr. Martin?"

"Let's say up to ten thousand dollars," Martin said calmly, and wanted to chuckle as he fingered the three silver dollars in his pocket—all the money he had in the world. "What about that?"

"Why, for ten thousand I have an idea you might even be able to get the L Bar C," said the banker. "Provided Lem Craddock doesn't come in next week to pay up the mortgage the bank holds."

"Sounds interestin'," observed Martin. He rose to his feet. "I'll see yuh again in a few days and we'll talk it over."

As he left the bank four men rode into town and halted their horses in front of the Majestic Saloon. Martin recognized Lem Craddock and had an idea the other three were L Bar C cowboys. Craddock had already been to town to report the finding of Vare's body to the sheriff, Brad Martin had learned. Now the rancher had returned with some of his men.

The four dismounted and tied their horses to the hitching rail. Martin sauntered across the street toward them.

"There he is!" yelled Craddock as he spied Martin. "I hoped that sidewinder would be in town!"

THE bearded man reached for his gun. So did the four men with him, but they were a little late. Martin had them covered with his own Colt.

"Don't try anything foolish, gents," he said tightly. "If yuh do somebody's liable to die sudden-like." He grinned slowly as they drew their hands away from their holsters. "Mm—that's better. Now, there's somethin' I'd admire to know. Why are yuh all so danged anxious to down me?"

"Because yuh drygulched that deputy marshal, that's why!" growled Craddock. "Sheriff Tilford and his deputy have gone out to bring in the body and we aimed to hold yuh till they got back."

"That's not the reason," Martin told him coldly. "Yuh could have only one reason for wantin' to get me. Yuh finally noticed the initials 'B M' scratched on the back of that marshal's badge yuh found in Ed Vare's pocket. My initials!"

"Huh!" snorted Craddock. "I suppose yuh'll be tryin' to tell us next that yuh're the real marshal, and that Vare was just a fake."

"He was," said Martin. "Just a cheap owlhoot who stole my badge and money I had in my saddle roll for safe keepin'. Yuh didn't want a real lawman around here, Craddock, because *you* and yore outfit have been doin' all the stage holdups and rustlin'."

Curious townsmen, seeing Martin covering the cowboys and boss of the L Bar C and scenting excitement, were converging along the street to learn what the trouble was all about. Murmurs rose as they heard young Martin's cold accusation.

"Yuh're crazy!" shouted Craddock angrily. "Why would a man with a big spread like I've got go to rustlin' and robbin' stages?"

"I figger yuh must be broke," Martin told him. "Anyhow yuh've got to get money quick to pay off that mortgage the bank holds on yore spread."

"Plumb loco!" Craddock growled and walked away. He unfastened the reins of his bay and swung into saddle. "I'm goin' to ride out and get the sheriff back to town right away. He'll settle this."

He motioned his men into the saloon and rode out of town. As the three cowboys silently entered the saloon, Martin dropped his gun into holster and hurried to the livery to saddle his roan. In minutes he was riding out of town, heading after Craddock.

Riding fast, he soon caught sight of the rancher on the road ahead. Craddock glanced back over his shoulder, saw Martin, drew, and instantly threw up his gun. He fired wildly, but close enough that bullets whistled all around Martin.

"Yuh shore can waste more bullets," Martin muttered plaintively.

The roan was swiftly gaining on the bay. The two riders were close together when Craddock's gun was empty. Furiously he flung the weapon at Martin's head, but it whined over his shoulders.

BE A WINNER AT ANYTHING YOU TACKLE WITH PROGRESSIVE POWER!

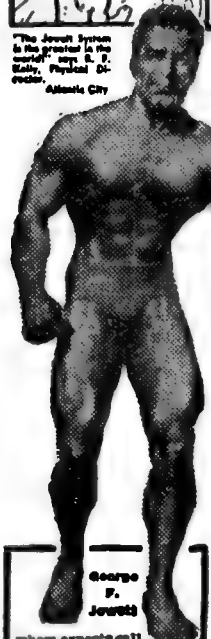
WHAM
DARLING, THAT BULLY WON'T PICK ON YOU AGAIN.
JOE YOUR NEW ENERGY AND APPEARANCE SURE DO A GOOD JOB! YOU EARNED YOUR PROMOTION.

Now ALL 5 FAMOUS JOWETT COURSES in 1 Volume 25¢

"The Jowett System is the greatest" says S. P. Kelly, Physical Director, Atlantic City

Let's Go, Pal! I'll prove I can make YOU an "ALL-AROUND" HE-MAN

Fast—or No Cost! says George F. Jowett, World's Greatest Body Builder.



Enjoy my "Progressive Power" Strength Secrets! Give Me 10 Easy Minutes a Day — Without Strain!

I'll teach you the "Progressive Power Method" through which I rebuilt myself from a physical wreck the doctors condemned to die at 15, to the holder of more strength records than any other living athlete or teacher! "Progressive Power" has proven its ability to build the strongest, handsomest men in the world. And I stand ready to show you on a money back basis—that no matter how flabby or puny you are I can do the same for you right in your own home. Let me prove I can add inches to your arms, broaden your shoulders, give you a man-sized chest, powerful legs and a Rock-like back—in fact, power pack your whole body so quickly it will amaze you! Yes, I'll jam you with power and confidence to master any situation—to win popularity—and to get ahead on the job! Through my proven secrets I bring to life new power in you inside and out, until YOU are fully satisfied you are the man you want to be.

PROVE IT TO YOURSELF IN ONE NIGHT

Send only 25c for my 5 easy-to-follow, picture-packed courses now in 1 complete volume "How to Become a Muscular He-Man." Try it for one night! Experience the thrilling strength that surges through your muscles.

George F. Jowett whom experts call Champion of Champions
- World's wrestling and weight lifting champ at 17 and 19.
- World's Strongest Arms - 4 times World's Perfect Body — plus other records.

I am making a drive for thousands of new friends fast—REGARDLESS OF COST! SO GET NOW MY 5 Muscle Building COURSES (Valued at $5 each) All in 1 Great Complete Volume Packed With How-To-Do-It Pictures!

Now, this "get-acquainted," extremely low price of only 25c is your chance to build a body you'll be proud of! Follow Jowett's easy method of muscle building NOW! For Only 25c

TO DAY TRIAL!

Think of it—all five of these famous muscle building courses now in one picture-packed volume for only 25c. If you don't actually feel results within ONE WEEK, send it back and your money will be promptly refunded. Photo Book of Famous Strong Men!

FREE!

Photos that inspire you to might and muscle. Free with order.

FREE GIFT COUPON!

Jowett Institute of Physical Culture
230 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, N. Y. Dept. TP-93

Dear George: — Please send by return mail, prepaid, FREE Jowett's Photo Book of Strong Men, along with all 5 Muscle Building Courses. 1. Molding a Mighty Chest. 2. Molding a Mighty Arm. 3. Molding a Mighty Grip. 4. Molding a Mighty Back. 5. Molding Mighty Legs—Now all in One Volume "How to Become a Muscular He-Man." Enclosed find 25c. NO C.O.D.'S.

NAME ..... AGE.....
(Please Print Plainly, Include Zone Number)

ADDRESS .....

George F. Jowett (Champion of Champions)

SENOR EL COLT

The exciting true story of Ranger Sam Walker, the fightin' hombre who gave his name to a gun!

by HAROLD PREECE

THE first splatter of buckshot missed the Rangers, but nicked little pieces of bark from the century-old cypress trees. A splinter of bark lit in the corner of a Ranger's eye. He brushed it with a quick flip of the hand, as he'd been brushing away the swarms of mosquitoes settling on his gun barrel.

It was a blistering Texas morning. The Ranger jerked his thumb toward the nearby Perdenales River, and drawled to a comrade posted behind another tree.

"You're runnin' this sociable, Cap'n Sam. But ain't it about time we give them hombres roostin' over there that surprise party? Keep company waitin' and they'll light out plumb disgusted for home!"

There was an easy, assured note in the voice of the red-headed young fellow with

the red mustache who answered. And the voice was of a piece with his mud-stained buckskins.

"Yep, Tom, that bunch has been blasting gun-talk at us since sun-up and they must be gittin' plumb tuckered. Reckon they're needin' a little refreshment to brace 'em up." Then the drawl soared above the buzzing of mosquitoes and the whine of outlaw gun-talk:

"Come on, boys, and help Sam Walker do the serving."

In a minute, the Rangers had mounted their swift Texas mustangs. In yet another minute, the hoofs of the ponies were clipping across the watery cypress bog. "Here's where we wind up the devil's picnic with fried lead."

Sam Walker, riding up in front, shouted back to his dozen comrades. When they charged out of the bog, the Rangers saw the sombreros of the outlaws sticking above little embankments of dirt built on the other side of the Perdenales.

"Hold yore fire, boys!" Walker called, "till you're even on the bank with 'em. Then wade in like blazes and shoot the same way!"

A bullet sang by the Ranger captain's face. A trickle of blood trailed down his cheek and stained a deeper red his thick, droopy mustache. "Mighty ambitious hombres!" he shouted to his partner, Tom. "But wait'll they get a taste of our surprise."

And it was indeed surprised hombres who tasted quick doses of lead when the Rangers reached the river bank.

Ranger pistols rang out five shots for every one fired by the mixed gang of Mexican horse thieves, stray Comanches, and white renegades. Ranger pistols were reloaded after every fifth shot. Outlaw pistols had to be reloaded every time. Sam Walker's pistol blazed five times and five renegades died under the blazing Texas sun.

Every Ranger sat solid in his saddle throughout the fray. The mustangs neighed fiercely as they splashed across the river in a bee line for the outlaw camp, seeming to know they were in a battle.

Roaring hoofs began smashing the embankment when the mounts cleared the river and hit the dry ground. Sam Walk-

[Turn page]

TO PEOPLE Who Want To Write

but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the former editor of Liberty said on this subject:

"There is more room for newcomers in the writing field today than ever before. Some of the greatest of writing men and women have passed from the scene in recent years. Who will take their places? Who will be the new Robert W. Chambers, Edgar Wallace, Rudyard Kipling? Fame, riches and the happiness of achievement await the new men and women of power."

Sells 95 Stories and Novelettes

"The introduction you gave me to your editor friend, resulting in my present assignment to do a complete novel for him monthly, is doubly appreciated, especially since I finished my N.I.A. training some time ago, and, consequently, have no call on your service. Here is concrete evidence that interest in your students continues indefinitely. To date now, I have sold 95 stories and novelettes to 20 national magazines."—Darrel Jordan, P.O. Box 279, Friendship, N. Y.

Writing Aptitude Test — FREE!

THE Newspaper Institute of America offers a free Writing Aptitude Test. Its object is to discover new recruits for the army of men and women who add to their income by fiction and article writing. The Writing Aptitude Test is a simple but expert analysis of your latent ability, your powers of imagination, logic, etc. Not all applicants pass this test. Those who do are qualified to take the famous N. I. A. course based on the *practical* training given by big metropolitan dailies.

This is the New York Copy Desk Method which teaches you to write by writing. You develop your *individual* style instead of trying to copy that of others. You "cover" actual assignments such as metropolitan reporters get. Although you work at home, on your own time, you are constantly guided by experienced writers. It is really fascinating work. Each week you see new progress. In a matter of months you can acquire the coveted "professional" touch. Then you're ready for market with greatly improved chances of making sales.

VETERANS:- THIS COURSE APPROVED FOR VETERANS' TRAINING

Mail the Coupon Now

But the first step is to take the Writing Aptitude Test. It requires but a few minutes and costs nothing. So mail the coupon now. Make the first move towards the most enjoyable and profitable occupation—writing for publication! Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. (Founded 1925)

Free

Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

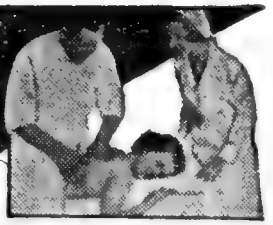
Send me, without cost or obligation, your Writing Aptitude Test and further information about writing for profit.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss } _____

Address _____

( ) Check here if you are eligible under the G.I. Bill of Rights. (All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.) 94-C-069

Copyright 1949, Newspaper Institute of America



Learn this Profitable Profession

IN 90 DAYS AT HOME

MONEY-MAKING CAREER OPEN to MEN and WOMEN, 18 to 50

Hundreds of men and women between 18 and 50 make $10 to $20 in a single day giving Scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is big demand from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums and clubs. Graduates earn large full time incomes from these or in private practice in their own offices. Others make good money from home treatments given in spare time. Learn this interesting, money-making profession in your own home, through our home study course. Same instructors as in our nationally known resident school. You can win independence and prepare for future security by qualifying for our Diploma. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. Many earn while they learn. Begin your training at once.

Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE

Enroll now and we will include, at no extra cost, many needed supplies. Fit yourself to help meet growing demand for Scientific Swedish Massage. Send the coupon at once for complete details. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Booklet, FREE, postpaid.

THE COLLEGE OF SWEDISH MASSAGE
Dept. 963C, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11, Illinois
Please send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, 32-page Booklet and complete details on Home Training.

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

OWN a Business

Clean and Mothproof rugs and upholstery "in the home." Patented equipment. No shop needed. Duraclean dealer's gross profits up to $20 a day on EACH serviceman. These Nationally Advertised services create repeat customers. Easy to learn. Quickly established. Easy terms. Send today for Free Booklet—Full details.
DURACLEAN CO., 69-3PL., DEERFIELD, ILL.

USE YOUR SECRET POWER!

Get your share of good things of life you've wanted but missed through uncertainty, shyness, inhibitions. Happiness, bigger income, love, confidence, come to those who use secrets of NATURLAW. Write postcard for inspiring, eye-opening FREE 16-Page book.
INSTITUTE OF NATURLAW, Dept. 12, 2208 Main, Dallas, Texas.

AMAZING OFFER — $50 IS YOURS

FOR SELLING ONLY 100 BOXES

of entirely different, new De Luxe All-Occasion cards. Patented feature television card included. Each box sells for $1.00, your profit 50c. Surprise items. It costs nothing to try. Write today.

WRITE FOR SAMPLES

CHEERFUL CARD CO., Dept. AM-1, White Plains, N.Y.

CARBURETOR TOO RICH MAKES MOTORIST TOO POOR

Car owners who are wasting money and not getting proper gas mileage due to over-rich mixtures will be pleased to learn how to save gasoline by VACU-MATING over-rich mixtures. VACU-MATIC fits all cars, trucks and tractors. It is *automatic* and operates on the supercharge principle. Easily installed in a few minutes.

SALESMEN WANTED! Big Profits! Send name, address on penny postcard for *free particulars* and how to get yours for introducing.
VACU-MATIC CO., 7617-1433 W. State St., WAUWATOSA, WIS.

er's cayuse, Diablo, pawed at a giant Comanche resplendent in Mexican sombrero and serape. The man raised a threatening war-club. Walker fired twice point-blank at the grimacing brave. The Ranger captain had administered the coup de grace.

Death Among the Cypress

Under the rapid fury of the Rangers' repeating five-shooters, other men were uttering their last in English, Spanish, and Comanche. Then one of the surviving outlaws recognized Sam Walker and began screaming:

"Senor El Colt. *Dios mio! Dios mio!*" "Senor El Colt!—" Other bandits took up the cry. And those who had not run for life into the cypress bogs dropped their guns and threw up their hands in surrender.

When the last shot had been fired and the last outlaw had been hogtied, Sam Walker slouched in his saddle and looked down through mild blue eyes at his catch.

But the eyes were steel blue when they singled out the bandit leader. This was a swarthy *Mejicano* who stared sullenly at the red-headed Ranger.

Walker's words cut like a knife:

"Seems to me, Senor, we've met before. Didn't you help guard our prisoners at Perote?"

"*Si, muy Capitano* Walker. And it was my pleasure to help bring you and the other Texan dogs back when they escaped."

Then Sam Walker remembered the nightmare of imprisonment in Mexico when an invading Texan force had been captured. He remembered the nightly floggings and vividly recalled having been hitched to a Mexican trash cart like a mule. But, most of all, he remembered Mexican Dictator Santa Anna's savage order to shoot every tenth Texan.

Walker and his comrades had been marched into a big room with a bowl of white and black beans in the center. Every tenth bean was black, and he who drew it had to die. The young Ranger had been lucky enough to draw one that was white. But he had seen his comrades who drew black, lined up against 'dobe walls and shot by Mexican firing-squads.

And this man now standing before him had been partly responsible.

"Senor!" Sam Walker said, "tonight you have yore send-off feast—a pot of black beans. You will have all the beans you want to eat, and that's more'n you ever did for us at Perote."

That night, the Rangers clustered grimly around the bandit chief as he scooped up the thick black beans out of a big pan. The prisoner ate slowly, looking up occasionally at the rising moon. Finally, he finished the last spoonful.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Capitano Walker," the bandit said, "I am ready. But one last request. Send my body back to Mexico. I wish not to be buried in the soil of your state of Texas."

Walker nodded to the Mexican. Then he waved his hand to the three Rangers already detailed as a firing squad. Calmly the bandit walked over to a huge pecan tree. He bared his chest and waited without twitching a muscle until he saw the pistols that his executioners trained on him. They were the terrible repeating guns that had wiped out his gang, eight hours before.

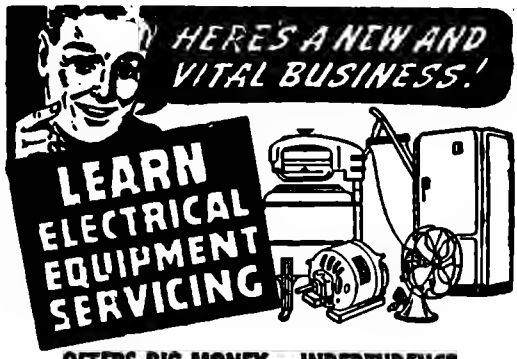
Fifteen shots from three five-shooters hit him fifteen times. He was still lying under the pecan tree next morning, when Walker ordered the body trussed across a mustang's back. Then he beckoned to another brown-skinned prisoner, and began scribbling something on a piece of paper. The note read:

This live polecat is taking this dead polecat back to Mexico to bury him. Let them both pass.

The Wonderful New Gun

For the next month, tongues wagged in Texas. Nobody talked much about the forty bandits blasted like rattlesnakes on the Perdenales or the one executed by Walker's firing squad under the pecan tree. Texas kept no account of either killed rattlesnakes or defunct outlaws. But everybody swapped excited gab about the new-fangled gun that had been used for the killings. That gun could down five men in the time that the old-fashioned cap-and-ball pistol took to put the quietus on one.

[*Turn page*]



OFFERS BIG MONEY — INDEPENDENCE

Learn in spare time at home. NEW Shop Method Training System. Work as many hours as you wish—the Electrical Equipment Technician is his own boss. It is not unusual for a technician to charge on the basis of $5.00 to $6.00 an hour!

NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE NEEDED

We furnish everything! Tool kits, training kits, including the famous Christy trouble-detecting ELECTRONIC KIT. Plus illustrated instructions written in simple, easy-to-understand language, chock full of photographs and drawings. Shows you how to repair factory and household electrical units. Power machinery, refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, irons, etc. Gives you a working knowledge of electricity, welding, nickel plating, etc. Shows how to build power tools you need, how to solicit business and what to charge. Many report paying for their entire course, tools, etc. on earnings made at home while learning!

FREE BOOK SENT TO YOU

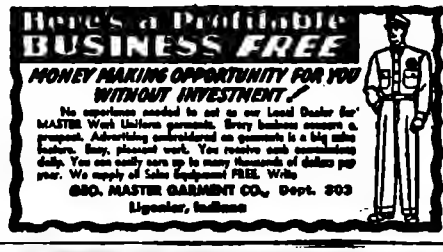
Send your name for FREE booklet on Electrical Equipment Servicing and instructions for paying us later from your EARNINGS WHILE LEARNING!

CHRISTY TRADES SCHOOL

Dept. B-2604 — 2835 N. Central Ave., Chicago 34, Ill.

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. **DETECTIVE** Particulars FREE. Write to **GEO. R. H. WAGNER**, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.



She Got $400.00 for a Half Dollar
I will pay CASH for OLD COINS, BILLS and STAMPS
POST YOURSELF! It pays!
I WILL PAY $100.00 FOR A DIME!
B. MAX MEHL, 133 Mehl Bldg., Fort Worth, Tex.
(Largest Rare Coin Establishment in U.S.)

PROTECT YOURSELF
SICKNESS or ACCIDENT
The New Family Mutual Hospitalization Plan gives you protection that is high in value but low in cost—only $1.00 per month for each adult, 50c per month for each child.

FOR SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

Hospital Room and Board up to	$6.00 a day for 30 days
Operating Room up to	$10.00
X-Ray Examinations up to	$10.00
Laboratory Examinations up to	$10.00

FOR ACCIDENT

Ambulance up to	$10.00
Emergency Accident—Dispensary up to	$6.00
Loss of Limbs, sight, etc., or loss of life up to	$500.00
Maternity Indemnity up to	$35.00

The policy provides indemnities for actual expense incurred at the time of hospitalization but will in no case exceed the amounts shown above.

Be protected against hospital bills, in case sickness or accident strikes you, by allowing the Family Mutual Life Insurance Company to aid you in meeting your hospital expenses. You may choose any hospital. Benefits for children are one-half those paid to adults.

DON'T DELAY—MAIL THE COUPON TODAY

FAMILY MUTUAL L[illegible] INSURANCE [illegible] WILMINGTON [illegible] DEL

Family Mutual Life Insurance Co. Dept. R-2
601 Shipley St., Wilmington 99, Del.
Please send me, without obligation, complete information on your Economical Hospitalization Plan.
NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____

A Penny May Bring You HAPPINESS!

Would you gamble a penny to win Happiness, Companionship, Love, Financial Success, through the help of a mysterious International Secret Organization? Then just send name and address on a post-card TODAY for your FREE Copy of great Book "Mayan Mysteries". It can change your whole life! Address Rose Dawn, The Mayan Order, Dept. 663, P. O. Box 2710, San Antonio, Tex.

LEARN MEAT CUTTING At Home—In Spare Time

Get into the vital meat industry. Concise, practical Home Training based on 25 years proven instruction method used at National's famous resident school. Prepares you for bigger pay as Meat Cutter, supervisor, market manager or more money in your own store. Go as rapidly as your spare time permits. Diploma. Start NOW to turn your spare hours into money. Send for FREE bulletin today. No obligation. National School of Meat Cutting, Inc., Div. TS-34, Toledo 4, Ohio

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

Cluthe Sons, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey

A new day had hit Texas and that day would stretch out for generations across the whole West. The day of the Colt had dawned. The five-shooter would shortly give way to the six-shooter as the frontier carbines would give way to the repeating rifle. These would be inspired of course, by the repeating revolver.

But Sam Colt from New Jersey would leave forever his brand on the West because Sam Walker from Maryland had made his gun famous in that big chunk of the West which was Texas.

Far away from Texas in that year of 1844, Sam Colt realized that he was a made man because of Sam Walker. The news of the battle on the Perdenales had hit the United States. Now, Sam Colt was happily writing checks to pay off his debts as men, who'd laughed at his repeating pistol, rushed in to give him orders. But Sam Colt, remembering his meeting with the drawling young frontiersman, knew he could never pay the debt he owed Sam Walker.

They'd met in Washington when Sam Walker had come to buy arms for the Texas Republic. And they'd liked each other from the start.

"You've got a good idea, Colt," the Texan had drawled. "But yore gun's too puny and too clumsy for Texas fightin'. You have to take the whole barrel off to swap a full cylinder for an empty one. Which means that a man in a runnin' battle has to hold on to all three parts to reload and keep from gettin' scalped or shot at the same time. Look at that trigger too. What's the use of hidin' it? And why don't yuh rig up a gun that'll fit snug into a man's hand?"

"Suppose you come back with me to my factory in Paterson and show me how to do it, Captain Walker," answered Sam Colt. When the young Ranger started back to Texas, two weeks later, he carried with him the first of the new and improved Colts named in gratitude "the Walker model."

But something bigger was shaping up in Texas and the United States than skirmishes with bandits. That something was the Mexican War. It started when Texas joined the Union. Before it started, Sam Walker was back to see Sam Colt for guns that had to shoot six times without reloading.

"Captain," said Sam Colt, "when this war is over, you've got a lifetime job with me selling my guns.

"Mister," chuckled Sam Walker. "I wouldn't be shore my lifetime's gonna last out this war. And I'd rather pack guns than peddle 'em."

General Zach Taylor in Danger

Not long after, Walker's Rangers were on the Rio Grande blazing a trail with their thundering guns for the American forces marching toward Mexico.

"We take mighty few prisoners, boys," Walker told his men camped on hostile territory, claimed but still not conquered by Texas. "And them we do have to carry a piece we feed on black beans."

Through spies, Walker learned that Mexican troopers were advancing across the Rio Grande with the intention of splitting the American lines and thereby cutting off General Zachary Taylor camped at Point Isabel, Texas. "We've got to warn Taylor," he said. "Saddle up, men, and let's get going."

They were twelve miles from Point Isabel when they saw 1500 Mexican cavalrymen rounding a bend in the road. From the distance of a hundred yards, the handful of Rangers opened fire on the Mexican horde. Thirty Mexican cavalrymen dropped; but so did thirty Texans in the first, fierce volleys. The Mexicans charged on their sleek, big horses. Ten more Rangers fell from their rangy cayuses.

Sam Walker knew he had to make a decision.

These Texas fighters were mainly raw recruits who but a few weeks before had been plowing corn in the East Texas Piney Woods.

To continue battling against such odds would mean the massacre of the last Texan by Dictator Santa Anna's crack cavalrymen.

"Dig into yore spurs, boys," Walker yelled. "We'll have another day to square up with this shebang."

The Rangers rode hard, the Mexicans pressing closely on their tracks. Only when they were near Port Isabel and American headquarters, did the cavalrymen give up the chase. The Texans

[*Turn page*]

FALSE TEETH FIT TIGHT FOR LIFE OF PLATE

With One Application OR YOUR MONEY BACK

Professionally Developed AMAZING

LINO-DENT

REAL COMFORT INSTANTLY FOR ALL PLATE WEARERS

At last — with no fuss or bother—looseness and slipping vanish—gum soreness heals and disappears—forever.

NOT MESSY • NOT STICKY

Not a paste—not a powder—Lino-Dent is an amazing development in the field of plastics. It is the same material modern dentures are made of. That's why we can guarantee *perfect plate comfort* not for just a month but *permanently* with *one application.*

ABSOLUTELY SAFE

Lino-Dent is pure, non-toxic, non-irritating, harmless, odorless, tasteless, pleasant, simple to use. Needs no heat.

It's professionally developed

YOUR MONEY BACK IF NOT COMPLETELY SATISFIED

EASY AS A B C TO USE

A. Apply to Plate.
B. Insert in Mouth.
C. Bite for Perfect Fit.

We guarantee perfect plate comfort permanently with only one application.

SEND NO MONEY Full size package only $1.25 plus postage. Specify upper or lower. Or send $1.25 and we will pay postage.

LINO-DENT, Inc. 1199 Broadway New York 1, N. Y.

LINO-DENT, INC., Dept. T-3
1199 Broadway, New York 1, N. Y.
Send LINO-DENT for:
☐ Upper ☐ Lower $1.25 ☐ Both — $2.25
I will pay postman ☐ $1.25 . . . ☐ $2.25 plus postage. My money will be cheerfully refunded if I am not satisfied.
NAME_____
ADDRESS_____
CITY_____ STATE_____
Enclose payment and you save postage!

AGENTS WANTED!

Make Sensational Profits with our sell-on-sight Household Merchandise Linel Plastic Tablecloths, Aprons, Raincoats, Combination Shopping Bags, Bridge Covers—Embroidered Pillow Case Sets, Towels, Hankies; Shower, Cottage Curtain Sets; Bibles; many other fast-selling, big-profit items, novelties; Postal brings free details, special money-making deals. *Write today. HURRY!*

Royalty Sales Co., Box 748, Passaic 5, New Jersey

Write Stories that SELL

Mrs. Grace Blanchard had an IDEA for a story. We criticised her story, gave it a new title and told her WHERE TO SEND IT. She got a substantial check THE FIRST TIME OUT. That is a THRILL many of our graduates have each month. Let 50 years of experience guide YOU. Endorsed by Jack London.

FREE BOOKLET "THE ART OF STORY WRITING" with explanation of our personal criticism and manuscript sales service. No obligation. Write!

Hoosier Institute, Dept. 171, 120 S. LaSalle St., Chic. 3, Ill.

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Specially prepared "Patent Guide" containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with "Record of Invention" form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
98-A District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

Get into BUSINESS for *Yourself!*

METALIZING BABY SHOES AT HOME IN SPARE TIME

Get facts now about amazing money making *Warner Success Plan* that shows you every easy step in completely charted path to personal independence—with your home as your headquarters . . . This proved and tested Plan is working like magic. It's backed by an old, reliable company . . . And we send it to you on a No-Risk Trial Money Back Guarantee.

QUICK CASH WAITING

Demand for METALIZED Baby Shoes and other keepsakes is growing bigger daily. Our Tested Plan Shows How to Do the Work, How to Bring in the Business, How to Make as much as $5 an Hour. Spare or full time, big steady profits are waiting for you. Send penny postcard or mail coupon for FREE Facts. Act! Time is precious.

FREE offer of **COMPLETE MONEY MAKING PLAN** • **SEND NO MONEY** Just Mail COUPON

Ray Brandell, Mgr., Warner Electric Co.,
1512 JARVIS AVE., DEPT. 243, CHICAGO 26, ILL.

Please rush complete details about your No-Risk Trial Money Back Plan for Metalizing Baby Shoes. Everything you send is FREE and costs me nothing—now or ever.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE ____ STATE _____

YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!

Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific

CRIME DETECTION!

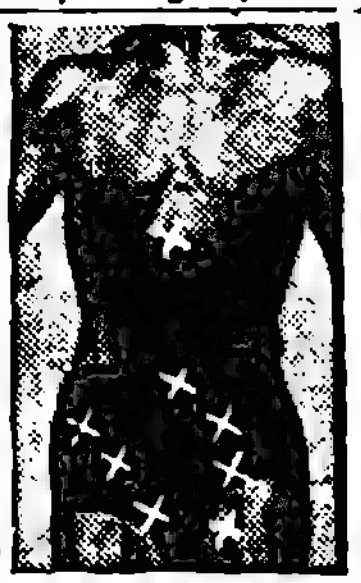
We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Identification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. Over 800 of all American Bureaus of Identification employ I. A. S. students or graduates. We can prepare you for this fascinating work during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7363, Chicago 40, Ill.

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Home Method. Heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe your trouble and get a FREE BOOK.
T. G. VISCOSE COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago 2, Illinois

LOOK for Rupture Help



Try a Brooks Patented Air Cushion appliance. This marvelous invention for most forms of reducible rupture is GUARANTEED to bring YOU heavenly comfort and security—day and night—at work and at play—or it costs you NOTHING! Thousands happy. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or springs. For men, women, and children. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Not sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and Proof of Results. Ready for you NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO., 183-C State St., Marshall, Mich.

stopped in a little draw to reckon up their numbers. Fifteen of the original seventy-five answered the roll call. Among the sixty dead or unaccounted for was their commander, Sam Walker.

The boys from the Piney Woods were tired and demoralized. They rested an hour and were spurring their horses toward Point Isabel when one of them let out a yell that could be heard a long way.

"Whoopee, fellers," he yelled. "Here comes the Cap'n. Now let's finish up this job of whupping blazes and tar grease out of Mexico."

Sam Walker rode into camp with Diablo lathering in a thick sweat from the hot sun. "All right, boys," he called. "But the first part of the job is to tell General Taylor what the Mexicans are up to."

A few days later, General Taylor, having moved out of the threatened position, marched to Palo Alto and engaged in the first large-scale battle of the Mexican War. Like Sam Colt, he wondered how he could ever repay his debt to Sam Walker. For it had been the shrewdness and courage of Sam Walker which had saved the American army from being wiped out before it had ever fired a shot.

"I can put 'em in decent clothes, anyhow," General Taylor was heard to remark. So he sent for Walker.

The two men gazed long at each other; the general in his fine-cut uniform, the Ranger captain in his shabby buckskin. Zachary Taylor thought that Sam Walker looked worse than any newly-mustered buck private without a change of rags. But he didn't say so.

"Captain Walker," he said, "I'm swearing in you and your Rangers as the Texas Mounted Rifles of the United States Army. Report to the quartermaster for your new uniforms."

"Yes, sir," answered Sam Walker. But, somehow, his uniform always bagged at the knees. And, somehow, the stiff military tie was never on straight.

The Feast of Black Beans

The Mexicans however, were not worried about Sam Walker's pants and his tie. They were too worried about his blazing Colts that sent so many a proud don to join his forefathers. In six months after the war had started, the nickname of

"Senor El Colt" had traveled across Mexico. That name and the Fiesta del Muerte —the Feast of Death—meaning the black beans served his condemned prisoners before Texas firing squads. They were to remind many of the black coffins to be planted underneath neat white crosses.

Walker and his men were in on the battle of Monterrey, helping to capture strategic Independence Hill with the help of General Blanchard's French-speaking Louisianans. The petite widow of a Louisiana officer cast longing eyes on the Texas captain, baggy breeches and all.

"Git on back to New Orleans, lady," he told her. "War ain't for women. And I'd have blistered yore hide before letting you get mixed up in this one."

The lady cursed him in French and in English. Then she packed up and returned to Louisiana.

Walker and his brave men finally struck out toward Southern Mexico and toward Perote. Their mission was to wipe out the guerilla bands harassing the forces of General Winfield Scott as he moved northward from Vera Cruz toward the final kill —Mexico City.

The Texans whipped the guerillas at Las Vegas on June 20, 1847, and twenty-five prisoners ate the Feast of the Black Beans. Next day, the Rangers defeated another guerilla band at La Hoya Pass. The booty included the guerilla flag—a banner embroidered with the skull and crossbones and the words; "No quarter."

"Your flag tells what you asked for," Walker told the prisoners of that battle. "And now, gentlemen, there's a fine feed of black beans waitin' for you. Eat hearty —because it's the last time you'll eat this side of Gehenna."

A few days later, Walker and his Texans were blasting their way with Colts and carbines into Perote. There, he rounded up all of those who had mistreated the Texas prisoners. Those who had tortured were served black beans for the entree and lead from Ranger Colts for dessert.

Afterward, Sam Walker personally directed the lowering of the Mexican flag from the castle where he had been imprisoned with his comrades. And he even remembered to hitch up his breeches when he saw the American flag being raised in its place.

[*Turn page*]

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME IN SPARE HOURS TO BE A RADIO SERVICE MAN!

I SEND YOU 8 BIG KITS OF RADIO PARTS!

FREE MAIL COUPON FOR CATALOG and Sample Lesson!

NOW! TWO LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU BETTER

Mail coupon to location nearest your home.

LEARN by Working with Your Hands *Building, Testing, Repairing Radios*

Get the facts about the Sprayberry Course . . . find out why it's the best Radio Training for you. See how I train you by sending you 8 big kits of real, professional Radio parts—how I train you to build a powerful 6 tube superhet radio, a 16 range test meter and perform over 175 interesting, instructive *Radio* experiments. My training is *practical*—it sticks with you, helps make money for you. You don't need previous schooling or experience. **YOU LEARN BY DOING**—following simple, easy lessons that teach you RADIO from the ground up.

Get Sample Lesson FREE

ACT TODAY! Fill out and rush the coupon to me—I'll send you my FREE BOOK "How to Make Money in Radio, Electronics and Television," and also valuable Sample Lesson, "How to Read Radio Diagrams and Symbols." I'll also tell how you can Earn While You Learn. VETERANS! Approved for G.I. Training under Public Laws 16 and 346.

SPRAYBERRY ACADEMY OF RADIO, Dept. 51-P
Sprayberry Bldg., Pueblo, Colo. *Or*
20 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago 6, Ill.
Rush my FREE BOOK and Sample Lesson.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY & Zone_____ STATE_____

Watch Repairing Pays Big Money Learn at home

Watch makers in great demand. Train step-by-step, under experts. We furnish tools. No interference with present job. Opportunity to get in business for yourself. 16 easy lessons. Low cost. Send for FREE book today.

WATCH REPAIRING [illegible]

ITCHY
Checked in a *JIFFY*

Relieve itching caused by eczema, athlete's foot, scabies, pimples and other itching conditions. Use cooling, medicated **D.D.D. Prescription.** Greaseless, stainless. Soothes, comforts and checks itching fast. 35c trial bottle proves it—or money back. Don't suffer. Ask your druggist today for **D.D.D. Prescription.**

RING for "WOLVES"

If you're a "wolf", you'll want to wear this unusual, emblematic ring. Handsomely formed from solid Sterling Silver. Girls. Give this ring to the wolves you know!

SEND NO MONEY! Just clip ad and mail with name, address, ring size and style. Pay postman only $2.98 plus few cents postage on arrival. Or send cash and we mail postpaid. Wear for 5 days. If not delighted, return for refund.

$2.98 POST PAID (TAX PAID)

WESTERN CRAFTSMEN • Dept. 4066 - Omaha 2, Nebraska

When PRAYER FAILS

The prayers of the most worthy people often fail. Why? The unworthy often have the greatest health, success, riches and happiness. The best, smartest, and most industrious people often have only pain, poverty and sorrow. Why? Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman found the answers to these questions. His eyes were opened by the strangest mystic he met during his twenty-one years of travels in the Far East. Sick then, he regained health. Poor then, he acquired wealth and world-wide professional honors. He wants to tell the whole world what he learned, and offers to send a 9,000-word treatise, FREE, to everyone who asks promptly. It is a first step to the POWER that KNOWLEDGE gives. There is no obligation. Write for YOUR FREE COPY today.

INSTITUTE of MENTALPHYSICS, Dept. 16-H
213 South Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles 4, Calif.

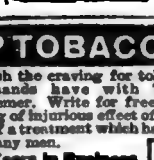
Fit-Rite makes False Teeth TIGHT

Makes loose dental plates fit snugly and comfortably. LASTS for MONTHS!

Simply squeeze on dental plate and put it in your mouth. Hardens and becomes part of plate. Money-back guarantee.

FREE Generous package of Dental Plate Cleanser with each order. Send $1.00 or mailed parcel post collect.

Fit-Rite Co., 1573 Milwaukee Ave. Dept. 3-82, Chicago, Ill.



DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

35 Years in Business
300,000 Satisfied Customers

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

RAISE HAMSTERS

The new wonder animals from Syria. Often called Toy Bears. Delightful pets. Everyone wants them. Laboratories need thousands. Clean, odorless. Raise anywhere. A profitable and interesting hobby or business. We furnish breeders and instructions. Write today for free book.

GULF HAMSTERY, 1537 BASIL ST., MOBILE, ALA.

MEN! THIS FINE SUIT YOURS WITHOUT PAYING ONE CENT!

BIG CASH EARNINGS TOO!

Big news! Wear this fine tailored suit without paying one cent and earn big cash income too! It's easy! Just take orders from a few friends and neighbors. Show actual samples of dozens of rich new fabrics superbly tailored in choice of all the latest styles at low prices. Money back guarantee on every order.

WRITE FOR FREE SAMPLES! Rush letter or postcard giving your name and address, and telling us about yourself—age, etc. We'll send you big profit of actual samples FREE, and details of amazing new BONUS SUIT and money-making plans. No experience needed. Send no money!

W. Z. Gibson, Inc., 500 S. Throop St., Dept. Q-677, Chicago 7, Ill.

He took out his long bowie knife, and scratched around under the flagpole for a few minutes. He came up with a soiled American dime which he showed to his men.

"I planted it there when I was a prisoner," he said. "I promised that I would come back when the American flag waved over Perote and pick up that dime."

Then for some unaccountable reason, his face blanched. Those nearest him heard him say, "I got away from death the first time in this country. I don't think I'll miss it this time."

Death came a few months later on October 20 at the storming of Huamantla. Walker and his Rangers rode first into the town to attack the Mexicans commanded by Santa Anna himself. Then followed General Lane and the American regulars.

Sam Walker had accounted for ten Mexicans with his roaring Colts when he was caught in a veritable crossfire of lead. He fell from his horse, the smoke from his Colts still trailing little wisps in the air. . . .

They buried him with a military funeral and tears rolled down the tanned, leathery faces of his Texans who looked on. But this time it was seen that his pants were neatly creased and his cravat was neatly tied.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

•

MALTBY, THE AVENGER

Another Exciting True Story of a Famous Texas Ranger

By HAROLD PREECE

PLUS OTHER STORIES AND FEATURES

LAWMAN NEEDED

(Concluded from page 81)

Then the horses were racing side by side. Martin reached out and dragged Craddock from the saddle, but the weight of the bearded man pulled Martin himself out of the kak. They landed in the road and had no time to be glad it was a soft spot. For the next instant they were fighting like infuriated wildcats. It was Martin who finally won—with a right to Craddock's jaw. It knocked the bearded man cold. When he regained consciousness his arms were tied behind his back—and Martin was standing near by with both horses ground-hitched.

"The man in yore outfit who knows about yore bushwhackin' will talk all right when he finds *he* is charged with killin'," Martin said coldly. "He's the one, I reckon, who found out a deputy marshal was comin' here—and offered Ed Vare five hundred dollars to get me. Only yuh didn't want to wait. Yuh didn't know what I looked like so yuh thought Vare was me and killed him. Yuh shot straight that time, Craddock."

Craddock had not a word to say. He was staring along the road at the sheriff and the deputies who were approaching, with a wagon carrying the dead man following them.

"Been talkin' about needin' a real lawman around here," Craddock did say then, bitterly. "Trouble is we *got* one."

Martin smiled grimly.

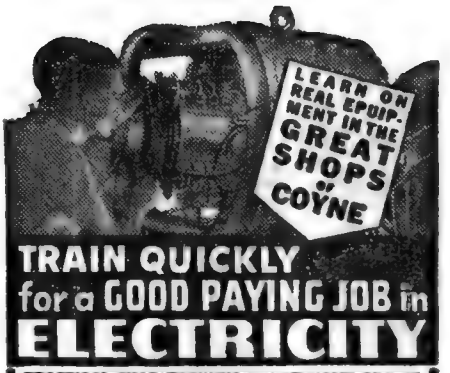
"Me," he said, "now I just can't stand flattery."

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

SECRET OF THE CENTRAL HILLS

An Action-Packed Complete Jim Hatfield Novel

By JACKSON COLE



TRAIN QUICKLY for a GOOD PAYING JOB in ELECTRICITY

PRACTICAL SHOP TRAINING — NOT HOME STUDY!

Don't let opportunities pass you by! Get ready for a better job in ELECTRICITY. Learn by doing . . . no previous experience or advanced education needed. HERE IN THE GREAT SHOPS OF COYNE you train on real motors, generators, switchboards, etc. G. I. APPROVED . . . Also Finance Plan for NON-VETERANS. Don't let lack of cash hold you back. Send coupon today for Big FREE Book. Men of draft age—get details of our special plan for YOU! Act now! 50th Anniversary Year.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

H. W. Cooke, Pres.,
COYNE Electrical and Radio School
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 29-84, Chicago 12, Ill.

Please send Big FREE BOOK and details of special plan for men of draft age.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

High School Course at Home — Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dept. H358, Drexel, at 58th, Chicago 37

Learn to MOUNT BIRDS

Tan SKINS, make up FURS

Be a Taxidermist. Double your hunting fun. We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Fish, Heads, common specimens. Fun and profits. Decorate home and den MAKE MONEY. Mount game, pets for others. Big profits in spare time. WRITE TODAY. 100 game pictures in FREE BOOK Catalog, get your copy. It's Free. Send post card. State your AGE.
NORTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY
Dept. 4403 Omaha, Nebraska

FREE BOOK

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO. 496-C FRONTIER BLDG.
462 NIAGARA ST. BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

TRY IT ON

MONEY-BACK OFFER

45 PHOTOS show exactly where to put your fingers

101 SONGS words & music INCLUDED!

Now let Bob West, radio's favorite guitar player, show you how! Most "Courses" have only 6 or 8 pictures—but Bob's new method has 45 actual photographs! It not only teaches but shows exactly where and how to place your fingers, etc. Most others offer a few songs—Bob provides 101!—chosen for their radio popularity so you can sing and play right along with your favorite radio program or records!

SEND NO MONEY: Just send name and address to Bob West and pay postman $1.69 plus COD and postage. Start playing beautiful chords the very first day. Be playing beautiful music in two weeks or get your money back.

BOB WEST, 1121 N. Paulina, Dept. 119, Chicago 22, Ill.

SEND FOR THIS FREE!

Make money. Know how to break and train horses. *Write today for this book FREE*, together with special offer of a course in Animal Breeding. If you are interested in Gaiting and Riding the saddle horse, check here ( ) *Do it today—now.*

BEERY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP
Dept. 823 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

on our capital. Always your own boss. Hundreds average $6,000 to $25,000 annual sales year after year. We supply stocks, equipment on credit. 200 home necessities. Selling experience unnecessary to start. Wonderful opportunity to own pleasant, profitable business backed by world-wide industry. Write RAWLEIGH CO., DEPT. C-U-TFG, Freeport, Illinois.

ARTIFICIAL EYES

Assortments mailed you from the world's largest, finest selection imported glass and all-plastic unbreakable eyes. Write for free booklet and color chart. Established 1906.

DENVER OPTIC COMPANY
1141 UNIVERSITY BLDG. • DENVER 2, COLO.

Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

If you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LIEPE METHODS FOR HOME USE." Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. **Liepe Methods, Dept. C-19** 2284 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

MAKE EXTRA MONEY

SELL

Build Steady Repeat Business
No Investment—No Experience.

UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES

SUPERIOR UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES

direct from America's Largest Exclusive Union Label Book Match Manufacturers. We feature PETTY Glamour Girls, Scenics, Handsome Dog series and NEW AD-DISPLAY DOUBLE BOOK MATCHES. Make BIG PROFIT QUICK. Write Today for SPECIAL OFFER and FREE POWERHOUSE selling kit.

SUPERIOR MATCH CO.
Dept. R-39, 7528 S. Greenwood, Chicago

THE FRONTIER POST

(Continued from page 10)

cow or any other animal. It's just that a cat hasn't any sense of time.

A cow savvies time. It knows when it's milking time, and you often see a dairy herd stringing for the barn then. A dog knows to the minute when his master is due home from work, and any horse gets restless when stood too long at a hitchrail.

But a cat never worries about anything. It just doesn't give two whoops what time it is, night or day. A cat sleeps when it's tired, eats when it's hungry and you can go and leave pet cat for days, but when you get back, what does it do? It yawns at you, plumb calm and unconcerned, as though you hadn't been away at all. But the dog leaps, barks and acts mighty delighted to see you home, at last.

Pet Rattlesnake

Speaking of pets, the oddest I've heard about lately is from C. Luguet of San Francisco, a man who's poked around plenty in the desert country. He tells me that he used to have a pet rattlesnake.

"Nobody dared touch my pack sacks," says friend Luguet.

He didn't explain the proper method for getting on friendly terms with a rattler. But me, I'm not hankering to know how, although I could get along with a nice, amiable skunk. I'm told that if you have a skunk around the place you never have to worry about rattlesnakes. Skunks don't bother the snakes but they clean out the rodents, which snakes prey on. No rodents, no snakes.

Pet deer are right common, from Texas west. I know a rancher who fed and tamed a fine young buck, and when hunting season came around he put a red ribbon around its neck with a bell tied on it.

But along came a city hunter, who shot the pet deer and lugged it off, red ribbon, bell and all. Whereupon my rancher friend swore a mighty, solemn oath.

"Never again will I make a pet of a wild critter, and teach it to trust man. It just makes it easy meat for some mean cuss."

Hunting Accidents

At the rate hunting accidents increase, there's excitement in deer hunting that never used to be. In Oregon, in the past season,

somebody figured out that hunters were shot in about the same proportion, per number engaged, as soldiers in battle. Besides which, there are no figures to show how many were shot at, but missed. Nearly every deer hunter I know can tell about some narrow escape.

A few years back, in the wild lava country of northeastern California, a hunter "accidentally" shot and killed his companion, his so-called best friend. An investigation followed, with the surprise wind-up that the killer was charged with deliberate, planned murder.

It's hard to explain why a man is mistaken so often for a deer. Me, I enjoy myself more hunting ducks. Some wild-eyed yahoo isn't so likely to take me for a greenhead mallard.

The Town of Azusa

Let's get back onto the subject of skunks—the four-legged, black-and-white variety. So's I can tell you a pretty good yarn about a town in southern California called "Azusa."

Newcomers, when they asked how that odd name originated, were told by local boosters that it was because they could grow anything there, "from A to Z in U. S. A."

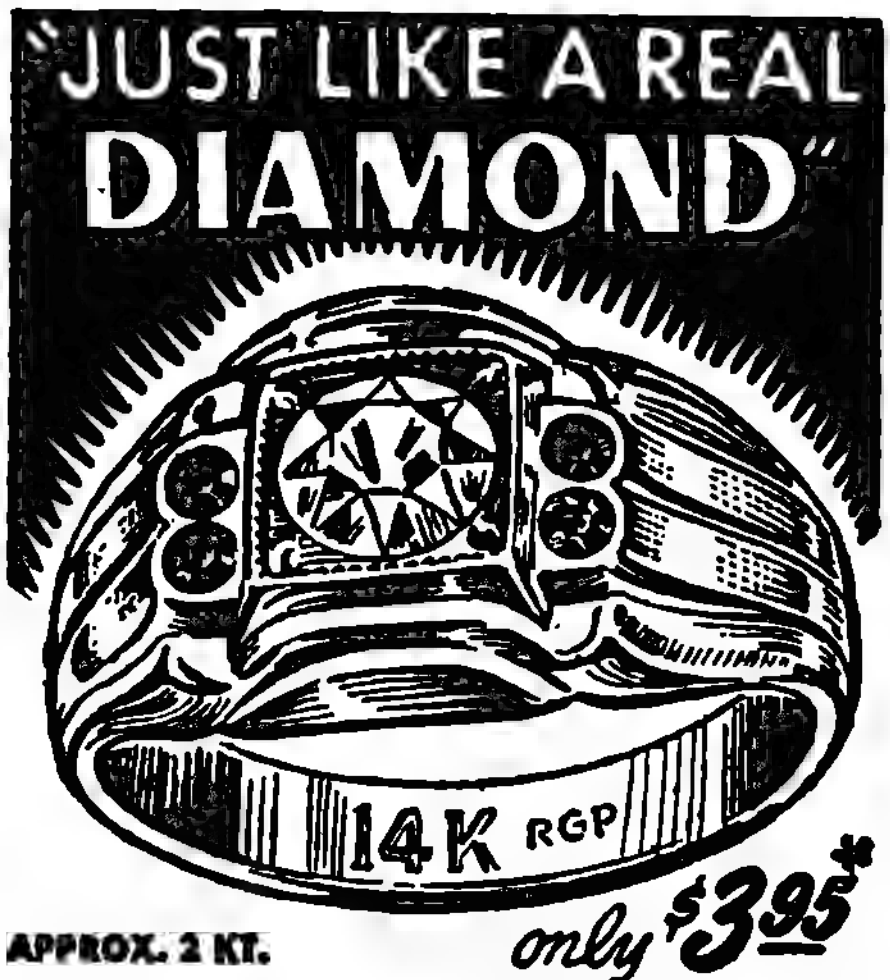
Their veracity suffered when an old bronze bell was dug up, a year or so ago, bearing the inscription, "Azusa, 1845." Proving that the name existed long before the first California booster arrived. The bell was used on Rancho Azusa to call the help to meals.

Boosters thereupon invented a romantic legend, claiming that the ranch, and later the town, were named after a beautiful Indian maiden named Azusa.

But alas! Some pioneer historian produced the fact that the early Shoshone Indians called that locality "Asuksumvit," from which the name, Azusa, was actually derived.

Sad to relate, "Asuksumvit" meant "skunk place." In Shoshone dialect, "asuka" (azusa) was the word for skunk.

[*Turn page*]



APPROX. 2 KT. only $3.95*

This handsome ring has the style, beauty and appearance of a $500 ring! It has 4 glowing Ruby-like side stones —a dazzling 2-Karat simulated diamond in the center— beautifully mounted in massive 14K R.G.P. A ring any man would be proud to wear. Now available at the unbelievable low price of only $3.95* (plus tax) while supply lasts. Order now — wear 10 days at our risk!

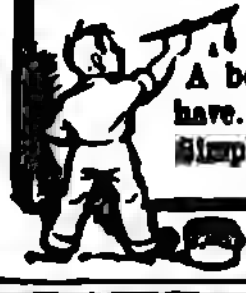
Order on Trial Inspection

10 DAY WRITTEN GUARANTEE

Send name and address and $1.00 deposit with C.O.D. order. Include ring size (or string you tied around ring finger.) When ring arrives pay postman only $2.95 plus tax and postage. SAVE MONEY! Send cash with order and we pay postage. This offer good only while limited supply lasts. (Written guarantee assures you full refund if not entirely satisfied.)

U. S. DIAMOND CO.
Dept. 15C, 225 N. Michigan, Chicago 1, Ill.

"How to Make Money with Simple Cartoons"



A book everyone who likes to draw should have. It is free; no obligation. Simply address

FREE BOOK

CARTOONISTS' EXCHANGE
Dept. 73 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

SUIT YOURS AS A BONUS

AND BIG MONEY IN SPARE TIME, TOO

We want you to wear this fine made-to-measure suit! Make it yours by sending a few orders, & earn BIG CASH PROFITS in spare time. Your suit will help you get more orders with scores of rich, quality fabrics, tailored-to-measure to newest styles. Also Ladies' Tailored Suits—complete line. Write today for FREE SAMPLES. NO EXPERIENCE, no money needed. For quick action tell us about yourself.

J. C. FIELD & SON, INC.
Harrison and Throop Sts. Dept. Q-1877, Chic. 7, Ill.

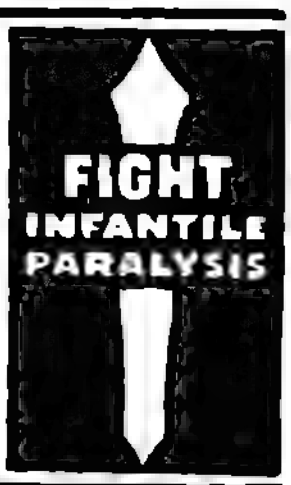
Refit and Tighten FALSE TEETH

With AMAZING PLASTI-LINER

If your plates are loose and slip or hurt; reline them better than new, with this pliable, non-porous strip. Just lay on plate, bite and it molds perfectly, hardens for lasting fit and comfort. Ends forever the mess, bother and expense of temporary applications that last only a few hours or few months. Will not injure plates, and guaranteed to give satisfaction or your money back. Write for Plasti-Liner today. Pay postman $1.25 for one reliner, $2.25 for both upper and lower—or send money now; save C.O.D. charges.

PLASTI-LINER CO., Dept. 47-F, Buffalo 15, N. Y.

Join the **MARCH OF DIMES**



500 Pages, 7000 Novelties

10c

Send 10c for mammoth, amazing catalog of 7000 novelties. 1-inch thick, roto picture section, 6-color cover. Carnival, circus, world's fair & science exhibit rolled into one! Includes live animals & pets, scientific supplies, hobbies, funmakers, planes & boats, looms, magic tricks, joke articles, unusual seeds, gadget timesavers, cameras, optical goods, projectors, movies, lucky jewelry, religious novelties, telegraph sets, disguises, musical instruments, stamps, coins, puzzles, fortune tellers, radios, experimental sets, auto & bike accessories, Western wear, telescopes, magnifiers, compasses, books, smokers' gadgets, artists' supplies, printing sets, engines, motors, shockers, knives, billfolds, fireworks, guns, rifles, sports, money makers, swimming helps, 1000 fascinating books, games, books, live chameleons, rings, exercisers, curious plants, etc., etc., etc. (DeLuxe Hard Bound Library Edition 25c Postpaid.) Regular paper covered edition 10c. (Stamps accepted.) Sent Air Mail, $1.00.
JOHNSON SMITH & COMPANY, Dept. C-78, DETROIT 7, MICHIGAN

TOOTHACHE?

Quick relief with Dent's. Use Dent's Tooth Gum or Dent's Tooth Drops for cavity toothaches. Use Dent's Dental Poultice for pain or soreness in gums or teeth. At all drug stores.

"Since 1888"

DENT'S TOOTH GUM TOOTH DROPS DENTAL POULTICE

EXCLUSIVE! NEW!

MAKE MONEY FAST!! SELLING MIRACLE CUSHIONED SHOES . . . Complete line entire family. New Spring styles! Women, Burgundies, Cordovans, Triple Soles, Whites, Hi-Lifters, Advance Commissions, Bonus over $3.00 pair. Free outfit. Samples. No investment.

PARAGON SHOE CO.,
Dept. p21 716 Columbus Ave., Boston 20, Mass.

LEARN HOW TO HYPNOTIZE

Amazing self-study lessons . . . in simple, easy to understand language. How to select a subject—how to hypnotize by telephone—how to make money from hypnotism—mental telepathy—stage hypnotism—self-hypnosis; how modern hypnotism is used to conquer inferiority complex, fear, battle fatigue, timidity, etc. Clear helpful pictures show operating positions, movements. Money-back guarantee. Only $1.95, postpaid—or COD, plus postage. Write today!

Nelson-Hall Co., 1139 S. Wabash Ave., Dept. C-8, Chicago 5, Ill.

SHORTHAND in 6 Weeks at Home

Famous Speedwriting system. No signs; no symbols; no machines; uses ABC's. Easy to learn; easy to write and transcribe. Fast preparation for a job. Surprisingly low cost. 100,000 taught by mail. Used in leading offices and Civil Service. Write for free booklet.
SPEEDWRITING, Dept. 9003-8, 55 W. 42nd St., New York 18

FREE BOOK— On Chronic Ailments

40-page FREE BOOK explains the causes and effects of these ailments. Write today—Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite 356, 926 McGee St., Kansas City, Mo.

Mighty nice and prosperous little town, just the same, and being a citrus-growing center, it smells more of orange blossoms than anything else. And now it's somebody else's turn to palaver for awhile. So *adios*, gals and galluses, until our next get-together.

—CAPTAIN STARR.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

ODDLY enough, the man destined to lead the muster on the roll of heroes who wore, and are still wearing the fabulous silver star of Texas inset like a jewel in a circle of glittering *plata*, was not a Texan born and raised. Rather, John Coffee Hays was hatched in Tennessee, moved soon after to the land of the Father of Waters, Mississippi, and did not arrive upon the Texas scene until his fifteenth year. From 1836 through the next four years the young Southerner made a big name for himself in the new republic as an Indian fighter.

So it was the logical thing for the youthful government, when in 1840 it decided to form the Rangers, to cast around for the best available man to command the outfit, and perforce choose Jack Hays, who was then a mere stripling of twenty-three.

There were those who scoffed and said that no boy of slightly more than a score of years could captain and direct the operations of what remains to this day a police organization of unbelievably wide-flung operations. But the doubters were soon to learn otherwise. Hays took over the reins of the new outfit and set it on the path to glory, a path from which the Rangers have never deviated.

When the United States and Mexico went to war in 1846, Jack Hays was commissioned a Colonel in the American Army, and for the ensuing two years he commanded The First Texas Volunteers, a regiment comprised, with few exceptions, of men who at one time or another had seen service with the Rangers. The First Texas Volunteers made a magnificent record for themselves in that unfortunate conflict, and all Texas turned out to welcome them triumphantly home.

Jack Hays, after a long and successful career as a law enforcement officer during the most turbulent periods in our history passed on, in the Lone Star spring of 1883, across the Great Divide. But down in Hays County, Texas, they'll remember John Coffee Hays as long as the land remains under the sky.

But other men came to fill the ranks of the

old soldiers, men equally as formidable as Jack Hays. Men of magnificent physique, sharp and probing intellect, and when the occasion a rose, of lightning gun hand.

One of these was Jim Hatfield, the intrepid Texas Ranger who rode to stirring adventure aboard a fine golden sorrel, and dedicated his life to fighting for justice!

We meet him once again in Jackson Cole's exciting novel, SECRET OF THE CENTRAL HILLS, slated for the top spot in the next great issue of TEXAS RANGERS. And we'll tell you right now that's it's one of the most significant and vital Hatfield novels we've ever published!

If you are familiar with Texas history you'll remember that the Central Hills country was at one time noted for the vast numbers of cattle which grazed the area. These days, of course, the Central Hills can also boast of enormous metal tonnage. But when Jim Hatfield rode into the section one hot day a long time ago, sinister forces had already begun their nefarious work of killing and rustling to drive out the cattlemen and dis-

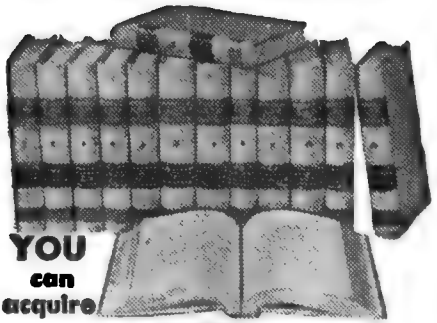
[*Turn page*]

America's Most

ENTERTAINING

Picture Magazine!

NOW ON SALE AT ALL STANDS
ONLY 15c PER COPY



LAW ***NIGHTS AT HOME!*** **L.L.B. DEGREE**

LaSalle's famous Law Library—used as reference in many Law libraries and Law offices—has enabled thousands to master Law surprisingly fast, in spare hours at home, for business and professional advancement.

These 14 remarkable volumes, compiled by leading professors and lawyers, cover the whole basic field of Law in condensed, orderly, simplified manner.

You advance rapidly with this great library, plus special lectures furnished. We guide you step-by-step with personalized Problem Method of instruction . . . you *learn by doing*—handling legal problems—not by memorizing rules.

Send for two FREE 48-page booklets, "Law Training for Leadership," and "Evidence," answering questions about Law and its value to you, and telling how LaSalle Law graduates are winning rapid advancement in business and public life. Mail coupon below. No obligation.

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A Correspondence Institution

417 S. Dearborn St. Dept. 3329-L Chicago 5, Ill.

Send me your two FREE booklets described above; without obligation.

Name.....*Age*.....

Street.....

City, Zone & State.....

Learn* BAKING *At Home

Baking is one of America's high industries in wages. Nearly depression-proof. Thorough basic home course lays sound foundation. If you have aptitude, write for FREE BOOKLET, "Opportunities in Commercial Baking."
National Baking School, 1315 Mich. Ave., Dept. 1803, Chicago 5

Free Sample!

Be the first to sell amazing, new GLOW IN THE DARK house numbers, switch plates, pictures, decals, religious articles, etc., etc. Represent a large manufacturer. Wonderful opportunity. Big Profits. Write at once for FREE SAMPLE.
MADISON MILLS, Dept. N-18
303 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N.Y.

LEARN AT HOME

TO BE A PRACTICAL NURSE

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates.

HIGH SCHOOL NOT REQUIRED

50th year. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another saved $400 while learning. Equipment included. Men, women, 18 to 60. Easy tuition payments. Trial plan.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 423, 41 East Pearson Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet, and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name.....

City.....*State*.....*Age*.....

New FALSE PLATE METHOD

Transforms Old, Loose, Cracked or Chipped Plates

Into NEW LUSTROUS BEAUTY-PINK PLASTIC PLATES . . . No Impression Needed

No need now to pay a high price for a new plate! Our new *scientific* "FALSE PLATE METHOD" saves you money and duplicates your old, unsightly and unsanitary plate into a new, light-weight, lustrous, beauty-pink plastic plate with your own teeth. Missing teeth are replaced with new, matching teeth. Simple instructions tell you how to make your LOOSE plate tight-fitting before duplication.

LOW AS $10

SEND NO MONEY Just write for our money saving *False Plate Method* that gives you a new plate within hours. Guaranteed.

WEST DENTAL LABORATORY
127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 70 Chic. 2, Ill.

TOMBSTONES

DIRECT TO YOU $9.95 up

Genuine Beautiful Rockdale Monuments, Markers. Satisfaction or MONEY BACK. Freight paid. Write for our FREE Catalog and compare prices.

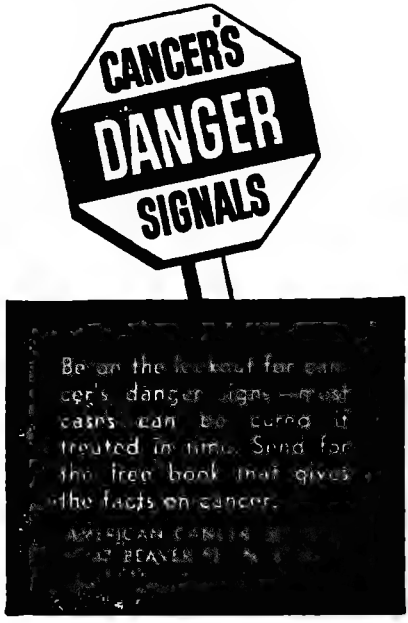
EASY Terms

ROCKDALE MONUMENT CO.
Dept. 456 JOLIET, ILLINOIS

Best New Western Action Fiction in

GIANT WESTERN

NOW ON SALE — 25c AT ALL STANDS!


CANCER'S
DANGER
SIGNALS
Be on the lookout for cancer's danger signs—most cases can be cured if treated in time. Send for this free book that gives the facts on cancer.

honestly take over the land that was rich in a newly discovered mineral—a commodity more valuable, so the owlhoots thought, than mere herds of beef.

An urgent call for help to Captain Bill McDowell's desk in Austin from Claude Pirie, owner of the huge Pie outfit in the Central Hills. Forty rustlers, all members of one outtrail band, were raiding and plundering Pie range. Already a Pie puncher had been savagely slaughtered by the brutal back-shooting riders. McDowell naturally called on his ace Ranger, the one officer in the Lone Star organization who could swiftly and surely handle the trouble. That man was Jim Hatfield—tall, intrepid and steely-eyed!

In company with fiery young Buck Robertson, Jim rode Goldy into the Central Hills. And if he expected trouble it was nothing to what he encountered there—they very moment he reached Pie range!

Here, in author Jackson Cole's own vivid words, is the warm welcome that awaited the silver-starred lawman and his saddle pard:

Night fell over them but Hatfield had taken his bearings. Pirie's ranch was back a mile or so from Granite Creek and he was sure he would see the house lights and be able to locate it easily.

Half an hour later Buck sang out. "Look at that!"

Hatfield was already staring at the increasing red glow ahead At first he had thought it a bonfire but it grew too large for this. "Maybe a barn or haystack," he muttered uneasily. The brisk night breeze was at their backs. It would fan the flames.

They urged the horses to greater speed. Coming over a rise they saw the Pie buildings before them. The surrounding area showed plainly in the ruby illumination and closer in they heard the roaring guns.

Buck gasped in excited dismay. "Why, the main house is burnin'," he cried.

The roof and upper walls of the large building were swept by dancing flames. Men on horses or afoot were in sight but they were not fighting the fire. They were throwing lead at another faction behind the long bunkhouse. Guns flamed, the heavy volleys and shouts of angry fighting men ringing in the night.

Hatfield heard a roar of warning! "Pirie! Here they come this way!"

Some one shouted a reply from behind the bunkhouse. "Keep back, Bunton, they'll sieve yuh!"

"We'll have to jump into this pronto, Bunk," warned Hatfield. Through drifting smoke he sighted a second line of rustlers headed for the other end of the bunkhouse making a determined effort to encircle the defenders and wipe them out.

"I hope they ain't taken the women prisoners,"

Hatfield shouted, pulling his Colts. "Open up, Buck," he said, nudging his youthful comrade. Buck had a carbine with him. He was an excellent marksman, a pupil of the Ranger's. Flat on the earth, hidden by a brush patch, and partially protected by granite rocks outcropping from the soil, Hatfield and Buck pulled trigger.

And that's just a sample of the slam-bang, rawhide action that makes *The Secret of the Central Hills* one of the most exciting and baffling Hatfield yarns we have ever published, in TEXAS RANGERS! Look forward to a great yarn!

Also in the corral for our next issue will be a stunning array of fast-moving stories and features by some of the country's finest western writers. Among these will be the true story of one of the most fearless Rangers of them all, MALTBY, The AVENGER, written by that noted western traveler and chronicler, Harold Preece.

All in all, *your* next issue of TEXAS RANGERS will be one of the best ever! A feast of good reading for everyone!

OUR MAIL BAG

WE'RE plumb happy about the number of letters we've been getting from readers. Generally the postman trundles them in stacked in his wheelbarrow. This month he needed an assistant to tote the extra sacks! Be that as it may, we dearly love to hear from all of you and want to assure you that your letter is carefully read and studied whether it is printed or not. You shape the policy of this magazine. Don't ever

[*Turn page*]

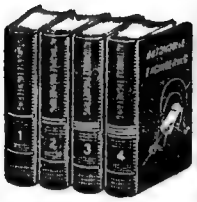
Follow the Exploits of Texas Ranger Walt Slade in

HAUNTED FOREST, by BRADFORD SCOTT

Featured in the March

Thrilling Western

Now on Sale — Only 15c at All Stands



AUTO BOOKS ON APPROVAL

SEND NO MONEY. Just mail the coupon for a complete set of 4 Big, Thick Auto Books, 20th Edition. Over 2700 Pages! Whether you are a mechanic or helper, expert or apprentice, auto owner or driver, take immediate advantage of this FREE EXAMINATION OFFER.

MAKE GOOD MONEY NOW HOLD A PERMANENT JOB

America wants its automobiles kept in good repair. Men with "know how" are in demand, at big pay. These books will help you get and hold an important job, or give you a chance to go into business for yourself now or later. Any man who half tries to improve himself can learn auto servicing and repairing by this quick reference method. Use the JIFFY INDEX to find easily understood answer to any auto problem. These wonder books prepared by eleven of America's great automobile engineers. Many hundreds of valuable illustrations. Send the coupon TODAY.

CAN YOU FIX IT? These wonder books tell step by step HOW to make difficult repairs and adjustments, how to keep a car at maximum efficiency, including latest improvements in car design and operation. Engine troubles and how to correct them well covered.

4 BIG, THICK VOLUMES Over 2700 pp., 2000 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc. Beautiful modernistic, washable cloth binding.

A year's consulting privileges with our engineers now given with these books without extra charge. *Publishers Since 1898*

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. A-349
Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago 37, Ill.
I would like to examine your 4-Volume Set of Auto Books. I will pay the delivery charges only, but if I choose I may return them express collect. If after 10 days' use I prefer to keep them, I will send you $2 and pay the balance at the rate of only $3 a month until $24.80 has been paid. Include consulting service as offered above.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address, and name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.

Be a DETECTIVE

Learn at Home in Your Spare Time

Be your own boss! Earn good money in this interesting, respected profession. This is a recognized authoritative course of training. Includes crime detection, prevention and identification; shadowing, undercover work, etc. Write for FREE BOOK describing training and opportunities. State Age.

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL
1701 Monroe St., N. E. Dept. 193C Washington 18, D. C.

LAW STUDY AT HOME for Business Success and LARGER PERSONAL EARNINGS. 40 years expert instruction — over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK NOW — "Law and Executive Guidance."

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 12-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

Send for this FREE BOOK on RHEUMATISM

ARTHRITIS • NEURITIS • SCIATICA

If you suffer the agonizing pains of these diseases when the usual remedies have failed, learn about a specialized system proven for treating. This marvelous treatment is completely explained in the Ball Clinic's **FREE BOOK.** *No Obligation. Write Today.*
Ball Clinic, Dept. 504, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

REDUCE FAT!

UP TO 5lbs. A WEEK

YET EAT PLENTY!

The New, Scientific Way to

LOSE WEIGHT

Feel full of pep and energy. Overcome that tired feeling this Doctor Approved Way!

NO STARVING
NO EXERCISE
NO LAXATIVES
NO DRUGS
NO MASSAGE

Absolutely HARMLESS and Actually GOOD FOR YOU!

REDUCE 10-20-30 LBS.

AND IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH!

WE GUARANTEE THESE STATEMENTS OR YOU

DON'T PAY A PENNY!

Don't be denied a beautiful, attractive figure. Lose ugly excess fat easily, quickly, pleasantly, safely — we guarantee it! KELPIDINE does the work with little effort on your part, is ABSOLUTELY HARMLESS and supplies a food mineral which is VITAL for balanced nutrition. KELPIDINE IS GOOD FOR YOU! It decreases your appetite, gives you more energy, vitality and vigor. YOU'LL ENJOY REDUCING THIS WAY!

Proven results are shown quickly. Many report losing 15, 20, 30 lbs. and even more in a few short weeks. With KELPIDINE, ugly fat and extra inches seem to disappear like magic.

Kelpidine (fucus) is the only known food product listed in medical dictionaries as an ANTI-FAT, FOR RELIEF OF OBESITY AND AS AN AID IN REDUCING. An United States Government Agency classifies KELPIDINE as a food. It is safe and brings remarkable results quickly and easily.

"My grateful Thanks to Kelpidine. In just a few weeks I lost 3 inches thru the waistline and hips. It's amazing." Joan Fleming, New York City.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE WITH A 10-DAY FREE TRIAL!

$2 If Kelpidine doesn't do the wonders for you as it has for others, if you don't lose as much weight as you want to lose, if you're not 100% delighted with results, YOUR MONEY WILL BE RETURNED AT ONCE!

FREE! The famous Dr. Phillips Reducing Plan which has helped many lose 20, 30 and up to 40 pounds, quickly and safely will be sent absolutely FREE with your order

MAIL COUPON NOW!

American Healthaids Co., Dept. 30
871 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey

Send me at once for $2 cash, check or money order, one month's supply of Kelpidine Tablets, postpaid. If I am not 100% satisfied my money will be refunded.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

☐ I enclose $5, send three months' supply.

SENT ON APPROVAL!

forget that when you write in. And now to horse!

I have just finished the September issue of TEXAS RANGERS and sure do like it. It's the first time I've read it but believe me I'll never be without TEXAS RANGERS again.—*Doris Williams, Whitney, South Carolina.*

I have been an ardent reader of TEXAS RANGERS ever since I picked up my first copy back in 1940. I especially like Doc Swap. Hatfield gets scratched and seared with hot lead a couple of times in every story. I bet that man is a mass of scars. Why not send Jim Hatfield after Long Lam Littlejohn, since Joe Fry can't catch him.—*Eugene Allison, Peoria, Ill.*

I have enjoyed reading TEXAS RANGERS for a good many years, and am taking this opportunity of saying so. Some people consider western books and stories as "trash"—the same narrow-minded people probably consider books about slums and juvenile delinquency also "trash." Just as the latter two topics are real powerful topics of today, western stories deal with real facts and places of the old wild West. I never skip a story in TEXAS RANGERS, I enjoy them all.—*Mrs. John Neuber, Springfield, Ill.*

What has happened to Jim Hatfield, the Lone Wolf? *Trouble on the Trinity* was the poorest story I've ever read in TEXAS RANGERS. I can't believe that if Jim Hatfield were a real person, he would take young Buck Robertson with him on a dangerous mission like he did in this story. TEXAS RANGERS has been my favorite magazine for over four years. I've never missed a single issue. Please keep Jim Hatfield single and let him ride alone. Then I will remain your faithful reader. More fist fights!—*Alton Futrell, Colfax, La.*

What's the idea of everyone not wanting Jim Hatfield to have a girl friend or to fall in love? I think it would add human interest to the story. The women in Hatfield's days weren't a bunch of lame brains like they are today. They fought and rode and did whatever was to be done alongside of their men. So I say give him a girl friend. It's only natural for any man to be in love—isn't it? —*Mrs. Lee Reich, Fresno, Calif.*

Well, ladies and gents, that concludes the events and now we must fold our tent, wind our twine and hit saddle for another part of the forest. Thanks for your wonderful communications and please, everybody, keep them streaming in. And if you agree or disagree with any of the above correspondents, let's hear about it. Kindly address all letters and postcards to the Editor, TEXAS RANGERS, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. So long for now—and happy reading!

—THE EDITOR.

Free as a balloon!

RID YOURSELF of economic worries and that's how you feel.

I.C.S. can show you how. Greater job security, more responsible work, higher pay, a home of your own—whatever you want is attainable if you qualify as one of the *trained* men vital to business and industry.

In today's world, untrained talent doesn't have a chance against expert knowledge. That's the reason why so many ambitious Americans are studying I.C.S. courses in 400 technical and commercial subjects — readying themselves for the big rewards.

I.C.S. receives more than 1500 letters a year from students reporting salary increases and promotions. Mark and mail the coupon as they did — and you, too, can be on the road to economic freedom. It's a grand and glorious feeling to join the successful!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3968-N, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Motor Traffic ☐ Postal Civil Service
- ☐ Retailing ☐ Retail Store Management
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician
- ☐ Power House Electric
- ☐ Ship Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Forging ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric
- ☐ Welding Engineering

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Locomotive Machinist
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engineer

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing ☐ Loom Fixing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Present Position_____ Employed by_____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Enrollment under G.I. Bill and P.L. 16 approved for World War II Veterans.
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

"EVEREADY" the battery with "NINE LIVES"!

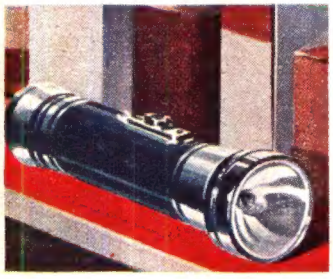
Just as an active cat...

...takes a cat nap and...

bounces back with new pep... so "Eveready" batteries bounce back for extra life!

BOUNCE BACK gives "EVEREADY" BATTERIES LONGER LIFE!

"Eveready" brand batteries give you fresh power when you use them: naturally, they use up some power when your flashlight is turned on ... but—



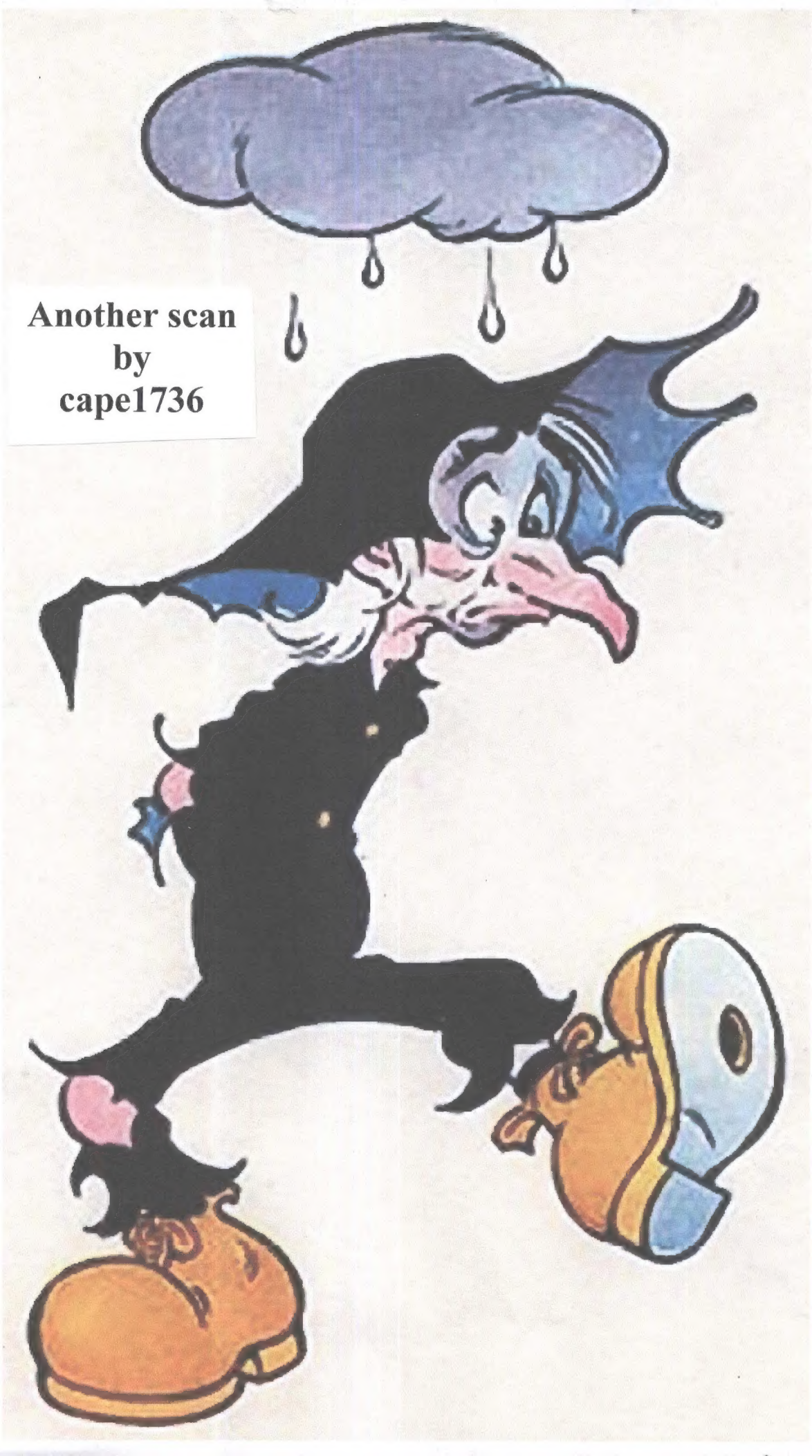
When your "Eveready" batteries cat nap between uses, the chemical elements in the cell develop fresh energy — recover power — so that...

When you snap on your flashlight again, the batteries *bounce back* with renewed power. That *bounce back* gives "Eveready" batteries *longer life!*

● Next time you buy batteries for your flashlight, be sure you get "Eveready"—the largest-selling brand in the world. Then you'll see what *bounce back* means ... why "Eveready" batteries are *the batteries with "Nine Lives"!*

"EVEREADY" FLASHLIGHT BATTERIES

The registered trade-mark "Eveready" distinguishes products of
NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.
Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation
UCC


Another scan
by
cape1736